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Untranslatability: A Problem, or a Practice?

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ARTICLES

Tasks of the Spivakian Translator

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Comparative Literature as a discipline, in the era of postwar area studies, global independence movements, postcolonial and decolonial theory, has been powerfully inflected by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak throughout a long and politically engaged career. *Death of a Discipline* (2003), which took stock not only of how the dial had moved from traditional Eurocentric paradigms of comparatism, but also of the way in which digital technologies were transforming modes of cultural production and dissemination at the expense of communities with limited access to costly media, was the work most pointedly focused on rethinking the discipline's remit.[1] But Spivak's concern with "comparativism's rethinking" was substantiated by hefty works that bracketed it, notably *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (1999) and *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012).[2]

In 2005, I published *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* and in the lead-up time to its completion, I was listening to Spivak, channeling her rewrite of Comp Lit's playbook through the lens of deconstructed area studies and linguistic specificities. *The Translation Zone* was included in a book series that I founded in 2000 at the invitation of Mary Murrell, a visionary editor at Princeton University Press.[3] Titled *Translation/Transnation* the series was conceived with the aim of bringing the study of minoritized languages and literatures into focus, emphasizing how their inter-relationality had been elided by publishing networks operating out of western capitals and global centers of power. At the crux of the series, and of my own work (not just *The Translation Zone* but also its sequel *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* published by Verso in 2013), was Spivak's translational praxis. Translation was at the core of her much-discussed concept of "planetarity," with linguistic regionalisms and untranslatable idioms a crucial part of her understanding of territorially grounded modes of expression. This grounding, as she emphasized recently in the Nabaneeta Dev Sen Memorial Lecture, (2022) reads agriculture quite literally as an anthropocenic writing, decipherable as earth's scar.[4] Translating planetarity emerges as a central project of ecocriticism, even if Spivak remains wary of the "eco" prefix, so often conscripted to give capitalism a human face. She also remains guarded in relation to translation itself, a process that potentially kills the phonic and phonetic presence of a given source language. From these concerns is born a disciplinary perplex: how to do things with translation that allow the resonances and *ritornelles* of language to persist and to be heard?[5] To answer this question we would recall Emile Benveniste's insistence on the *nuntial* [enunciatory] dimension of language, with nuntial underscoring the power of the vocative, the capacity to "proclaim or utter the real," to "transform a lexicon into a discourse," and thereby subjectivize vocalization.[6]

Emphasizing the live aspect of discursivity in language-specific contexts in an ongoing project on translation and justice, I try to delimit "what is just translation" across sound and sense spectrums and under conditions of force of law. This commitment to hearing and translating "justly" is fully beholden to the kind of listening practices built into Spivak's pragmatist approach to expertise-sharing within the limits of specialisms. This is where

studying languages, including one's own, proves essential, the key to parsing complex tensions between the imperatives of cultural belonging (predicated on psychopolitical investment in a shared linguistic commons), and the negative fallout of attachments to a fiction of monolingualism that lends itself to ethnonationalist identity politics. The chasm that yawns between the antipodes of language as collective solidarity and language as sovereign zone of exclusion is constitutive of what I think of as untranslatability. It is compounded by another chasm worked over by Spivak: the relative dearth of non-European theoremes.

This dearth is part of what Spivak's rubric of "global criticality" aims to redress. She draws on a repertory of untranslatables marked by the languages and places from which they hail.[7] An example is found in the term *abigarramiento,* applied by the Bolivian critic René Zavaleta Mercado (in *Towards a History of the National-Popular in Bolivia*) to "the motley," with its symptoms of "disjointedness, incongruousness, beyond mere difference."[8] This idea of a non-insular "peripheral-motley" configuration – yielding ground to a greater indigeneity and extended meanings of subalternity, presents an advanced intersectionalism. Entered into the vocabulary of "global criticality," *abigarramiento* opens a space for translocal readings that call on Comp Lit's historic disciplinary identity as an engine of translation. It is this vision of *the translating machine, inside the teaching machine* – that animates Spivakian praxis.

A clearer picture of what that praxis entails emerges from the collection of Spivak's writings on translation published by Seagull press under the title *Living Translation.*[9] It stands as a go-to reference for those committed to decolonizing Comparative Literature and translation studies. I am pleased to include a fleshed-out version of my Foreword to the book in this special issue of the *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* devoted to the topic of untranslatability.[10]

Foreword to *Living Translation*

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, one of the shape-shifting thinkers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, has uniquely contributed to the fields of comparative literature, global feminism, subaltern studies, postcolonial theory, electoral education, the ethics of planetarity, and last but not at all least, translation studies. In *Living Translation*, which performs the invaluable service of gathering her most significant writings on translation, we see in sharp relief the extent to which, throughout her long career, she helped make translation a critical catalyst of the comparative humanities. Starting with her landmark "Translator's Preface" to Jacques Derrida's *De la grammatologie* (*Of Grammatology*) in 1976, and continuing with her "Translator's Foreword" to Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" (and Afterword to Devi's *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*) Spivak tackled translatability as such from the ground up and at the political limit; at border checkpoints, at sites of colonial pedagogy, in acts of resistance to monolingual regimes of national language, at the borders of minor literature and schizo-analysis, in the deficits of cultural debt and linguistic expropriation, and, more generally, at theory's edge, which is to say, where practical criticism yields to theorizing in Untranslatables.[11] (This volume also provides information about how her institution-building as director of Comparative Literature at the university of Iowa—and in her subsequent places of employment—began at the same time.) From this perspective, Spivak takes her place within a distinguished line-up of translator-theorists that includes Walter Benjamin, George Steiner, Jacques Derrida, Benoy Majumdar, François Cheng, Louis-Jean Calvet, Samuel Weber, Susan Bassnett, Abdelfattah Kilito, Barbara Cassin, Abdessalam Benabdelali, Jean-Jacques Lecercle, François Jullien, Lydia Liu, and Lydia Davis, all of them particularly attuned to the processes of cognizing in languages, all of them alive to the co-productivity of thinking, translating, writing.

Like many in this company, but in ways unparalleled, Spivak developed a singular focus on the *politics of translation*. A watershed essay of 1992 on "The Politics of Translation" kicks off with the avowal that "The idea for this title comes from the British sociologist Michele Barrett's feeling that the politics of translation takes on a massive life of its own if you see language as the processes of meaning-construction." Spivak would lend heft to translation politics' "massive life of its own," starting with this essay, in which she situates language within an ensemble of "gestures, pauses [. . .] chance, [and] subindividual force-fields of being which click into place in different situations [and] swerve from the straight or true line of language-in-thought."[12] Taking recourse to translation as conceived in this expanded field, Spivak will underscore the importance of *gendered agency* as a mode of resisting "capitalist multiculturalism's invitation to self-identity." "The task of the feminist translator," she writes, "is to consider language as a clue to the workings of gendered agency."[13] When Walter Benjamin coined the expression "task of the translator" (*die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*) in the foundational essay of 1923, gender and agency were predictably absent as conceptual levers of meaning-construction, subject formation and *Überleben* (*sur-vie,* afterlife, survival, living on, or as Sam Weber renders it, "living away"). Spivak's insistence on placing them at the heart of the translator's task is no small move. It opens the way to a translation practice that is decidedly unsafe in the way intimate reading—which demands surrender to regions outside the self's comfort zone—de-secures foundational knowledge and identitarian footholds. In the name of an untameable literarity and in response to the summons to unpack the Foucauldian doublet of *puissance/connaissance*, Spivak writes evocatively of the frayed "selveges" of the language-fabric.[14] Its raggedy threads, when pulled apart, weave the kind of uncanny relation to alterity that prompts Melanie Klein to look "at the violent translation that constitutes the subject in responsibility"[15] and enables Derrida to insist that speaking in a language not his own (English) "will be more just." Derrida's phrase inspires Spivak to claim the right "to the same dignified complaint for a woman's text in Arabic or Vietnamese, a claim echoed later on in her call for an ecopolitical planetary justice.[16]

Spivak's translational model of "planetarity" overrides difference-shattering globalisms (translatese) and taps into the spirit-orientation of animism, native cosmos and a "native space" of the Third World translator who self-others by no longer remaining oblivious to class privilege or susceptible to the majority-pleasing dictates of the translation market. This alterity, associated by Spivak with seeing oneself as a "planetary accident" rather than as a "global agent" or entity, might be seen as a version of the untranslatable inasmuch as it is *underivable* ("alterity remains underived from us, it is not our dialectical negation, it contains us as much as it flings us away").[17] Like an etymology without a radical, or a metaphysics without first philosophy, or a civilizational history without "step-wise connections" between "sowing cereals in our primeval past and waiting in line at the Department of Motor Vehicles," alterity is non-derivating,[18] inhabiting a space-time of indeterminacy between the human and the natural (Spivak's condition of the Aboriginal), and between discrete languages.[19] In its cosmic dissemination, alterity models a kind of antiphilology.

The impress of antiphilology can be discerned in an approach to intellectual history and literary genealogy that bypasses influence paradigms in favor of novel conjunctures: Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schiller, Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, Melanie Klein, Emanuel Levinas, and Jacques Derrida appear alongside Benoy Majumdar, Rabindranath Tagore, James Joyce, J.M. Coetzee, Mahasweta Devi, Assia Djebar, Oe Kenzaburo, Wilson Harris, Maryse Condé, Farhad Mazhar, Toni Morrison, and numerous Bengali poets, lately Sankha Ghosh. This is not just an eclectic array; these figures engage in agonistic dialogue, producing a dialectics of cultural translation that allows conflict, irresolution and inter-pretive difficulty to have standing. "Cultural translation" in Spivak's ascription is no mere

blandishment for differences adjudicated according to standardized measures of moral equivalence or specious criteria of same. To translate in the Spivakian mode is to ensure that the translator has effaced her "voice," always insufficiently, to be haunted, perhaps, by an "original:"

> Knowledge depends on cooking the soul with slow learning, not a one size-fits all toolkit. You cannot produce a toolkit for a "moral metric," or if you do you will be disappointed. What is it, then to translate? Deep language learning of the original, straining to be haunted by it as it can be learned before reason. Effacing oneself, being as little as possible so the text speaks. Never to translate from an imperial language translation, never.[20]

The commitment to counter epistemicide by translating away from imperial languages prompts a profound rethinking of what translation *is* and *does* and *for whom it serves*.[21] The imperative "Never to translate from an imperial language" points to a postcolonial politics of translating that often relies on strategic uses of marked failure or withholding. We see this at work in Spivak's discussion of dilemmas faced when translating Mahasweta Devi's *Chotti Munda ebong tar tir* (1980). Expressing dissatisfaction with her rendering of the phrase *hoker kotha bollo na Chotti* as "Didn't Chotti speak of 'rights'?" she notes:

> *Hok*, in Bengali, a *totshomo* or identical loan word from the Arabic *al haq*, is not rights alone but a peculiar mix of rights and responsibilities that goes beyond the individual. Anyone who has read the opening of Mahasweta's novel knows that the text carries this presupposition. *I have failed in this detail. Translation is as much a problem as a solution.* I hope the book will be taught by someone who has enough sense of the language *to mark this kind of unavoidable failure, and that the rare reader will be led to the Bengali.* emphasis added).[22]

The political tasking of translation in a Spivakian frame —with critical pedagogy urgently foregrounded—is fully in play and on display, soldered to expressions of hope and love:

> I myself prepare my translations in the distant and unlikely hope that my texts will fall into the hands of a teacher who knows Bengali well enough to love it, so that the students will know that the best way to read this text is to push through to the original. Of course, not everyone will learn the language, but one might, or two! And the problem will be felt.[23]

And the problem will be felt. This little phrase packs a great political punch. For it outlines the dimensions of a larger project for translation studies today—how to effectively translate into and from little-taught languages, often of "the Global South"—while addressing, indeed repairing, those weaknesses in contemporary liberal education that hail from North America, specifically curricula that promote packaged sound-bites, standardized deliverables, frictionless learning processes based on supposedly value-neutral data and monocultural accessibility at the expense of plurilingual difficulty.[24] Spivak's initiation of a Bengali bilingual series with Columbia University Press, with glossary and critical introduction is proof of another kind of institution-building.

When we read the essays assembled in *Living Translation* from beginning to end (and even out of the chronological order in which they were written), what emerges is a picture of translation theory as a critical praxis traversing the history of colonialism and its aftermath, and transforming a range of postwar isms and movements: poststructuralism, deconstruction, global feminism, subaltern studies, anthropocentric humanism, eco-criticism. Throughout, there is an attentiveness to translation as pedagogy—in some ways the only pedagogy—capable of challenging monolingual protocols in the Euro-American academy. In Spivak's public call for a curriculum in which all students would already know or study a non-European language, what is at stake is not just a way of working in world literatures that acknowledges the risks of translation-as-violation or cultural appro-priationism, but a politics of pedagogy that fastens on the singularities and withholdings of each and every idiom.

Translation withheld, marked as failed, and *not*-translated qualify as hallmarks of Spivakian untranslatability even if untranslatability is not a term Spivak herself would necessarily subscribe to – her practice as teacher and translator roundly affirms translatability as a precondition of transnational literacy.[25] If I make the case here for a Spivakian untranslatability, it is in the interest of marking something very particular to her way of working *as a translator*, something we might think of as a *self-resistance* (or autoimmunity?) that maps onto and derives vibrancy from that which is resistant in language itself.

This double helix of self-resistance/language resistance is on display in Spivak's preface to her translation from Bengali into English of Mahasweta Devi's story collection *Breast Stories*. In the story "Drapaudi" Spivak confronts the caste term for "untouchables," always problematic in Indian languages (and giving rise to Mahatma Gandhi's assimilation of untouchables to tribals through the name *Harijan*, "God's people," a mistranslation insofar as tribals should not be confused with untouchables).[26] Spivak notes Devi's decision to follow "the Bengali practice of calling each so-called untouchable caste by the name of its menial and unclean task within the rigid structural functionalism of institutionalized Hinduism."[27] And yet she chooses to go with the phrase: "The untouchables don't get water," admitting bluntly "I have been unable to reproduce this in my translation."[28] The defeated translator finds strength in the caste term's resistance to translation because it sets the stage for a pedagogical scene, one that demonstrates, first, how translating prevents autochthonous meaning from shining through, and second, how the withholding of content can be strategically deployed to disrobe the posture of all-knowingness and entitled access directed by western Anglophone readers towards texts in Indian languages. "I have been unable to reproduce this in translation" is a gesture that points to reserves of untranslatability that lie in the deep structure of discursive hierarchies, themselves imbricated in a specific politics of history.

Spivak channels undercurrents of resistance within language as such by tapping into the untranslatability effects produced by colonial language policy, racial injustice, caste discrimination, religious wars, ethnic cleansing, apartheid, ecocide, cultural globalization, and ethnonationalism. Consider, by way of example, her analysis of Farhad Mazhar's *Ashomyer Noteboi* (1994). In response to Mazhar's lines:

> Untimely notebook, I'm giving a fatwa,
> > you're murtad
> I'll dorra you a hundred and one times
> > You're shameless

Spivak avows:

> I am unable to access *murtad* and *dorra* because they are *tatshomo* words from Arabic…. Tat in these two words signifies "that" or "it," and refers to Sanskrit, one of the classical languages of India, claimed by the Hindu majority. They are descriptive of two different kinds of words. *Tadbhabo* means 'born of it.' *Tatshomo* means 'just like it.' I am using these two words by shifting the shifter *tat* -that or it – to refer to Arabic as an important loan-source.[29]

Spivak expatiates often on Bengali-Arabic shared etymologies, often obscured by politicized philology. Her attention to loanwords, as in Tamara Chin's recent work on Silk Road loanwords in antiquity, brings together pre and postcolonial approaches to the politics of historical semantics.[30] Spivak's semantics bears little in common with that of the positivist nineteenth-century philologists who tracked a meaning to its mythic origin or *Ursprung* with the aim of shoring up linguistic genetics and the "genius" of a people. As I have already suggested, Spivak practices instead a kind of antiphilology that dredges up histories of linguistic conquest and erasure primarily for the sake of translational justice. To this end, she will call out "the fashioners of the new Bengali prose [who] purged the language of the Arabic-Persian content" by Sanskritizing Bengali.[31] With its Arabic and Persian

components reduced to little more than local color within the refined contemporary Bengali that Spivak was taught in school, terms like *murtad* and *dorra* are rendered opaque, effectively untranslatable.

The story does not end here however. *Murtad* and *dorra* lead Spivak to subtle insights into how *partition* operates in language politics. In abstract terms it refers to a partitive, parthenogenetic process in language, like a splitting of the word's atomic particles which, once combusted, shower the world with potentially toxic elements. As a historically grounded particular, it canonizes the event of *Partition,* applicable on the subcontinent to the division of West and East Bengal in 1947 and the secession of East Pakistan as the People's Republic of Bangladesh in 1971. Spivak's gloss on partition dissects how untranslatability – in this case the suppression of Arabic and Persian roots – becomes a visible symptom of the violent and bloody history of ethnic cleansing:

> If the establishment of a place named Bangladesh in a certain sense endorses the partition of 1947 – the language policy of the state, strangely enough, honors that other partition – the gradual banishment of the Arabic and Persian elements of the language that took place in the previous century – and thus paradoxically undoes the difference from West Bengal. The official language of the state of Bangladesh, 99 percent Muslim, is as ferociously Sanskritized as anything to be found in Indian Bengali.
>
> It is over against and all entwined in this tangle that the movement to restore the Arabic and Persian element of Bengali, away from its century-old ethnic cleansing, does its work. And it is because I grew up inside the tangle that, in spite of my love of Bengali, I could not translate *murtad* and *dorra* – though I could crack *ashamoyer* with Nietzsche.[32]

Not-translating *murtad* and *dorra,* grappling with resistant translation in contexts of political violence and ethnic cleansing, is a *worrying task,* with "worry" understood as symptom of anxiety tracing all the way back to Spivak's preface to *Of Grammatology*, possibly her earliest reflection on the auto-inflicted afflictions of the translator:

> Derrida's text certainly offers its share of "untranslatable" words. I have had my battles with "exergue" and "proper." My special worry is "entamer." As we have seen, it is an important word in Derrida's vocabulary. It means both to break into and to begin. I have made do with "broach" or "breach" with the somewhat fanciful confidence that the shadow-word "breach" or "broach" will declare itself through it.[33]

When Spivak mentions "my special worry," we could take it in an anodyne way to mean problem-solving, or thinking within the constraints of language. But we could equally well pick up on its more aggressive significations; worrying in the sense of twisting, pulling, biting or cutting away at the verbal thing to arrive at the *right target, le mot juste.* In this case, that which is cut out – the alternative word-choice – haunts the translation like a phantom limb. Spivakian "worrying" in this scenario, enters the world of Derridian hauntology.

Living in the cuts where meanings fork and self-divide, living in the break of translation (which implies *living on* its worry-spots, its flesh-wounds), entails experiences of pain and suffering that must be fully tasted because they put us in touch with traumatic hauntings. But these same breaks afford breakthroughs in thinking. This is what happens with the untranslatable loanword *haq,* which Spivak knows is particularly conducive to lucky finds. Taking off on Patrick Wolfe 's surmise that it may have a connection to the English word "hock," (connoting extortion, ransom or bounty) with a history in the violent Crusades narrative of hostage-taking and age-old conflicts between Christians and Saracens, Spivak embarks on a path leading from "hock" to *al-Haq,* the Arabic expression for truth (in the sense of genuine, real, right or righteously) that sometimes stands in for the name of Allah in the Qur'an.[34] She then takes a leap, translating *haq* into a notion of 'para-individual structural responsibility' into which we are born – that is, our true being," with the proviso that "responsibility" be taken as an approximate translation for a "structural positioning"

associated with birth-right.[35] It is this approximate space, this "not quite English sense of my *haq*" that hatches the invention of a new theoreme of global criticality – *planetarity*, a term predicated on "a precapitalist feeling of responsibility for the planet" that eludes "a rationally justifiable teleology."[36] "You will indulge me, [writes Spivak] if I say that the 'planet' is, here, as perhaps always, a catachresis for inscribing collective responsibility as right."[37] This catachresis – a rhetorical figure signaling *mistranslation* (as when one uses mitigate for militate) – seeds an outline for a planetary bill of rights that "speaks" in a language – precapitalist and paraindividual – that the translator must train herself to hear and to transcribe.

There are many untranslatabilities operative in Spivak's writings on translation, but they arguably converge in a model of concept-labor –Spivak's signature task as a translator - that translates towards alterity; towards episteme-logics that do not yet exist.

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Notes

[1] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

[2] See, the chapter "Rethinking Comparativism" in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 467-483.

[3] Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

[4] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "A Tribute to the Incomparable" Nabaneeta Dev Sen Memorial Lecture, 1/15/2022). Christine Brooke-Rose stages this in Aka's last dream of the land between two rivers [Mespotamia] breeding satyrs leading to "lived happily ever after." https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84226921825?pwd=bFB0NGZKV2ZRSVkrZlc5OWZZTDEvQT09

[5] In "Imperative to Re-Imagine the Planet" Spivak will invoke "Plotinus justifying the ethical as a beautiful *resonating*" (emphasis mine) as a figure for "the ecological practice of living"), *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* op. cit. p. 341.

[6] Giorgio Agamben, "Foreword" to Emile Benveniste, *Dictionary of Indo-European Concepts and Society* Trans. Elizabeth Palmer (Chicago: Hau Books, 2016), p. xv.

[7] Spivak often uses the expression "global criticality" in talks and panels, but has not, to my knowledge, published a text where the term is referred to and defined.

[8] . Anne Freeland, Afterword to René Zavaleta Mercado's *Towards a History of the National-Popular in Bolivia* (London and Calcutta: Seagull Press, 2018), p. 272. She notes that *abigarramiento* is grounded in "the coexistence of multiple modes of production and multiple conceptions of world within a single national territory" and poses an "obstacle to social-scientific analysis and liberal democratic politics premised on the existence of a more or less unified national citizenry. (275) *Towards a History of the National-Popular in Bolivia* was published in the "Elsewhere Texts" series co-edited by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Hosam Aboul-Ela.

[9] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Living Translation* eds. Emily Apter, Avishek Ganguley, Mauro Pala, Surya Parekh (Calcutta: Seagull Press, 2022).

[10] My heartfelt thanks to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Bishan Samaddar for permission to reprint the Foreword.

[11] Drawing on it as the conceptual catalyst of her monumental *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* (2004), Barbara Cassin used the notion of the "Untranslatable" (*l'intraduisible*) to designate how a term or syntactic structure springs to life, becomes, as it were, fully activated, only when the reader or speaker encounters its resistance to translation, its recesses of opacity and obstinate meaning. For Cassin, the Untranslatable is not an exceptional category reserved for select keywords; it applies quite even-handedly to any term or concept in the throes of mistranslation, non-translation, or ceaseless retranslation.

[12] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Politics of Translation" (1992) in *Living Translation* op. cit. p. 36.

[13] Ibid. p. 37. Spivak here anticipates Judith Butler's relatively recent focus on gender and translation: "I now believe that gender is a problem of translation, and we probably shouldn't be thinking

about gender outside of the context of translation," (Butler, "The Countertext Interview," *Countertext* 3[2] [2017]: 127). In another piece, Butler attacks the issue of "gender" (in English) as a so-called "foreign" term, capable, on the one hand, of arousing exorbitant fear and censorship or, on the other, of functioning as some kind of universal cipher in feminist and LGBTQ theory ("a generalizable concept no matter the language into which it enters"). Butler makes the forceful case that "there is no 'gender theory' without a problem of translation," and that "the fear of 'gender' as a destructive cultural imposition from English (or from the Anglophone world) manifests a resistance to translation that deserves critical attention." See Judith Butler, "Gender in Translation: Beyond Monolingualism," in Jude Browne (ed.) *Why Gender*? (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 15–37.

[14] Ibid. p. 38.

[15] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translation as Culture" in *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* op. cit. 243.

[16] Spivak, "The Politics of Translation," op. cit p. 40. In "Translation as Culture" Spivak cites the discussion of transcoding in Lee Cataldi and Peggy Rockman Napaljarri's introduction to Yimkiirli: Walpiri Dreamings and Histories. Their reference is to the phrase "lost our language" used by the Australian Aboriginals of the East Kimberly region. Spivak adumbrates their account of how the ecopolitics of translation proceeds under conditions of settler-colonialism. Shifting to the Walpiri people of Central North Australia, Spivak observes:

> Cataldi and Napaljarri, our translators, inhabit an *aporia*, a catch. Some of their material 'is derived from land-claim documents,' already a site of transcoding a mnemonic geography into the semiosis of land as property. [. . .] What is the relationship between standardized environmentalism, on the one hand, and traditional knowledge systems on the other? Mnemonic geography and satellite positioning technology? This is also a transcoding question. Just as we cannot content ourselves with collecting examples of diasporic hybridity, so also can we not just read books translating "other cultures." See, "Translation as Culture," in *Living Translation* op. cit. pp. 77-78.

Spivak's intuition that the trajectory of translation is from the performative to performance is useful here. See, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 18, 404).

[17] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Imperative to Re-imagine the Planet," in *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* op. cit. p. 339.

[18] Kwame Anthony Appiah uses the phrase "step-wise connection" in his review of *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity,* a book coauthored by David Graeber and David Wengrow that challenges the "cereals to-states arrow of history" and the presumption that "a mode of production comes "with a predetermined politics." "Digging for Utopia," *The New York Review of Books* Vol. LXVIII, No. 20 (Dec 2021): 80.

[19] In its anti-foundationalism, this antiphilology, which pushes against inheritance models of philological genesis and transmission, bears pronounced affinities with antiphilosophy, associated in the western tradition with the work of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Derrida, Lacan, and Laruelle among others.

[20] Spivak, "What Is It, Then, to Translate?" *Living Translation* op. cit. p. 182.

[21] In "Necessary yet Impossible," Spivak writes: "In our time, in postcolonial countries, decolonizing the mind in translation practices has mostly not yet been activated or achieved. We tend to translate from translations into imperial languages." *Living Translation* op. cit. p. 159.

[22] "Translating into English," *Living Translation* op. cit. p. 94.

[23] Ibid.

[24] The theme of repair features strongly in *Living Translation*. Drawing on the work of Melanie Klein (much as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick does for her concept of "reparative reading"), Spivak observes: "This originary *Schuldigsein*—being indebted in the Kleinian sense—the guilt in seeing that one can treat one's mother tongue as one language among many—gives rise to a certain obligation for reparation" ("Translation as Culture," *Living Translation* op. cit. p. 72). In *Ambiguities of Witnessing: Law and Literature in the Time of a Truth Commission* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), Mark Sanders builds on Spivak's Kleinian model of reparative translation in a discussion of the role of languages in testimonies given to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. On this topic, see also Emily Apter, "Afterword: Towards a Theory

of Reparative Translation," in Francesco Giusti and Benjamin Lewis Robinson (eds), *The Work of World Literature* (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2020): 209–28.

[25] In referring to Spivakian untranslatability, let me affirm the obvious: there are many untranslatabilities in her own work, and in my own as well, even if I have at times implicitly restricted the term's usage by applying it to fugitive dimensions of style and form, theopolitical interdictions, ethnonationalist ontology as it takes root in linguistic nativism, and language passporting at the checkpoint. The diversity of approaches to the untranslatable is fully on display in Barbara Cassin's *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon,* a work that I helped edit and translate into English. Each entry, one could say, represents one of many ways of looking at the blackbird of the untranslatable.

[26] Spivak, "Drapaudi," *Living Translation* op. cit. p. 130.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] "Translating into English," *Living Translation* op. cit. pp. 97, 98.

[30] See, Tamara Chin, "The Afro-Asian Silk Road: Chinese Experiments in Postcolonial Premodernity," *PMLA* 136.1 (January 2021): 17-38.

[31] "Translating into English," op. cit. p. 99.

[32] Ibid. p. 101.

[33] Spivak, "Translator's Preface to *Of Grammatology*, *Living Translation,* op. cit. p. 32.

[34] Patrick Wolfe's email to Spivak, cited in footnote to "Translating into English," *Living Translation* op. cit. p. 94.

[35] Spivak, "Imperative to Re-imagine the Planet," op. cit. p. 341.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

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An Ethical Suspension of the Political: Untranslatability with Beauvoir and Cassin[1]

LISA FORAN

How we name each other sets in motion how we treat each other, each act of naming both opens up a certain mode of engagement and closes off others. When we tell each other our nationality or our political affiliation, our religion or our ethnicity, our gender or our class, and so on; we reveal an aspect of who we are. Sometimes we do this explicitly, at other times we do so implicitly or unintentionally. We each have many aspects and often these sides of who we are affirm our membership of a group – Republicans or Democrats; Catholics or Hindus; male or trans and so on. This group membership may be an integral part of how we understand ourselves and relate to others, or it may be experienced as merely incidental. As Iris Marion Young has argued, group membership is part of the contemporary human condition that in itself is relatively neutral but is also not simple or exclusive. Rather, group membership is "multiple, cross-cutting, fluid, and shifting […]. In complex, highly differentiated societies like our own, all persons have multiple group identifications." (Young, 48)

Organising structures in society will often necessarily treat individuals according to their group membership. Those who can vote, for example, must belong to the group of registered voters of the right age with the right citizenship requirements. Group membership based on age or income are often ways of categorizing individuals such that they can gain access to education or social welfare or health care and so on. At times, treating people according to specific group memberships they hold, is relatively innocuous. However, as we know, group membership can also be mobilized as a force of oppression by those operating on the far-right of the political divide in the hinterlands of fascism. In this terrain, individuals are reduced to their membership of one group only, they become 'woman', 'black', 'Hispanic', 'Muslim'[2] and so on. There is a claim here of total accessibility; people are not taken as complex multifaceted individuals existing as a nexus of many identities together – father, doctor, son, immigrant, friend – but instead are treated as single category. These clear and distinct categories of people can be translated into values according to a sliding scale. There is nothing about the human condition, according to this model, that cannot be reduced to a simple meaning – people are in or they are out, one of us or one of them, an untapped market or an expedient target; a source of capital or an enemy to be vilified. In such discourse there is nothing ambiguous, there is nothing untranslatable.

Our current political climate is, to say the very least, worrying. At the time of writing the United States – the country with the greatest military force in the world – is undergoing the least peaceful transfer of presidential power in centuries. Neo-fascist supporters of lame duck president Trump attacked the seat of democratic power in Washington on the 6th of January 2021, seeking to overturn valid election results. A riot that echoed a similar attempt on Germany's Reichstag in August 2020. In November of that year, France's Emmanuel Macron announced the need for Muslim integration and followed this with an 'anti-separatist' bill in December. Europe is once again embracing the far right and its policies of othering and exclusion that do not simply echo the discourse of the 1930s but seem to repeat it with only minor revisions. This rise of the far right is, it seems, a global phenomenon found in the United States with Donald Trump, in France with Marine le

Pen, in the Netherlands with Geert Wilders, in the Philippines with Rodrigo Duterte, in Brazil with Jair Bolsanaro, in India with Narendra Modi, in Russia with Vladimir Putin and so on and on it goes.

The contemporary far right is afflicted with a taste for conspiracy that prevents rational coherence, so that there is apparently no contradiction between claiming to be for 'law and order' while violently protesting the law. There is no issue with recognising the election of those one supports, while simultaneously viewing the election of those one opposes in the same system as rigged. The opinion of experts, such as scientists and doctors, can be disregarded in favour of the opinion of outliers with expertise in unrelated fields. These contradictory positions are presented as 'opinions' – as though reality were a matter of taste rather than fact. In the midst of a global pandemic, when the world faces both economic and ecological disaster, the politics of late capitalism is responding with hyper-individualism, segregation and, most terrifying of all, an almost total abdication of responsibility.

In this paper I argue that the untranslatable allows us a way of countering this dangerously simplified approach to political organisation by giving us the means to think that complex nexus of multifaceted identity which each of us is. This universal structure – the untranslatable – manifests in the unique and particular existence of each of us. Against a discourse that reduces the other to nothing but their membership of one group, I argue that it is only through engaging with the ambiguity of the human condition that we can introduce an ethical counter to the most extreme expression of the political.

I firstly outline the manner in which Simone de Beauvoir navigates that ever difficult relation between the particular and the universal. I then go on to describe Barbara Cassin's account of languages as energies that manifest the world through rays of difference. In this vein, the untranslatable is not that which we can never understand but rather that which provokes a better and ever-changing understanding. Finally, I bring these strands together, to claim that the untranslatable offers us a way to think what I would like to call an ethical suspension of the political, that nonetheless can make a new understanding of the political possible.[3]

<div align="center">I</div>

In her 1947 work *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir responds to critics of existentialism who claim that it leads to a solipsistic egotism. Jean-Paul Sartre had attempted the same task in his 1945 *Existentialism is a Humanism,* but arguably Beauvoir's account provides a more rigorous, or at least more convincing line of reasoning. In it she discusses what she terms an 'existentialist conversion' (a term, along with others only slightly modified, that Sartre would also adopt, without acknowledgment, in his own later work)[4]. This 'existentialist conversion' entails wholeheartedly accepting the tragic ambiguity of the human condition – that we are not what we are, and that we are what we are not. What it means to be human is to constantly transcend one's facticity towards a freely chosen meaning. Existence precedes essence – converting to this creed entails rejecting all ethics which seek to reduce humanity to some kind of definition based on a hierarchical structure along those all too familiar philosophical lines of body/soul, mind/matter, death/immortality, sensible/rational and so on. Rejecting a definition of humanity that cloaks a closed system of ethics, in favour of an open, complex and paradoxical description of its condition, is not simply to convert to a more accurate ethical standpoint, but is in fact, according to Beauvoir; the only possibility for a genuine ethics at all.[5] In other words, being human entails a constant and unsettled negotiation of multiple identities that intersect in complex ways and only an ethics that recognises this ambiguity is worthy of the name.

Beauvoir takes up Sartre's description of the human being as "'a being who *makes himself* a lack of being *in order that there might be* being'"(Sartre in Beauvoir 10 *ff*). However,

Sartre's claim that the consequence of this lack of being is only failure or, in his own words that 'man's passion is useless', is implicitly rejected by Beauvoir. The 'passion' described by Sartre is our ever-unrealisable desire to coincide with being, we are always more than just what we are – a waiter, a sister, a writer, a mother, a teacher – no matter how much we wish to take refuge in the shelter of these definitions. Only God can be one with being and our trying 'be' one with our facticity, trying to deny our transcendence, is for Sartre a failure to assume the atheism necessary for existentialism by replacing god with humanity. Yet to describe the desire to be what one will always exceed as 'useless' or a failure is for Beauvoir to firstly miss the point that terms such as 'useless' or 'failure' acquire their meaning only in a human world – outside of humanity there is no objective value against which to gauge one's actions or to assess the worth of one's project. "The lack of existence cannot be evaluated since it is the fact on the basis of which all evaluation is defined" (14). In other words, the transcendence borne of the lack of being at the heart of the human condition, is the very thing that gives rise to that condition from which all language and meaning emerges. Assuming this lack as a positive possibility, rather than a useless inevitability, finds a certain validity as a manifestation of existence itself. In trying to be God, we might make ourselves exist as human. The danger is only in thinking that we have overcome the failure, in thinking that we have reached some god-like co-incidence with ourselves. It is this affirmation of negativity that Beauvoir terms a conversion. As she says:

> "The failure is not surpassed, but assumed. […] To attain his truth, man must not attempt to dispel the ambiguity of his being but, on the contrary, accept the task of realizing it. He rejoins himself only to the extent that he agrees to remain at a distance from himself." (12)

What then of ethics? If we accept that we are an ambiguous play of transcendence and facticity, how does this impact on our relations to others and what are the possible consequences for our political situation? "An ethics of ambiguity will be one which will refuse to deny a priori that separate existants can, at the same time, be bound to each other, that their individual freedoms can forge laws valid for all" (17). In other words, an ethics of ambiguity is one which will recognise the individual as occurring within a network of others. This balancing of the particular and universal is echoed in Cassin's account of words and concepts operating not in universal, abstract isolation, but in particular and connected semantic webs. To which I will return shortly.

At the heart of the existentialist project is the understanding of this ambiguity as the condition for freedom. We must freely choose our existence; yet doing so is arduous and as a result we tend to flee freedom – to deny it or to limit it in order not to have to deal with freely choosing who we are. As children we occupy a 'metaphysically privileged' sphere insofar as we inhabit a realm where values are ready-made and available like so many objects in the world. We are, in Martin Heidegger's terms, 'thrown' into a pre-disclosed world where we do not have to decide what is 'good' or 'bad' we simply take these meanings as they are provided to us by the adults around us. This idyllic state is shattered in adolescence when we realise that the values we had once blindly accepted from our adult guardians are invented, chosen and decided upon. The realisation that we must make the world anew for ourselves and freely choose our own values produces a state of anxiety in which we might well try to escape our freedom and responsibility by taking shelter in the kind of existences that Beauvoir vividly describes through various characters or personas. These characters share not only an inability to fully assume their freedom but also, more detrimentally, they fail to realise the relation between their freedom and that of others.

The first of these characters Beauvoir introduces, and by far the one to receive her harshest criticism, is that of the 'sub-man'. Afraid to will the lack of being that nonetheless

cannot be denied, the sub-man turns away from freedom and takes refuge in the ready-made values of others:

> "He will proclaim certain opinions; he will take shelter behind a label; and to hide his indifference he will readily abandon himself to verbal outbursts or even physical violence. One day a monarchist, the next day an anarchist, he is more readily anti-Semitic, anti-clerical, or anti-republican […] He realizes himself in the world as a blind uncontrolled force which anybody can get control of. In lynchings, in pogroms, in all the great bloody movements organized by the fanaticism of seriousness and passion, movements where there is no risk, those that do the actual dirty work are recruited from among the sub-men" (47).

Such malleable characters, who think what they are told to think, say what they are told to say, are what they are told to be by someone else regardless of logic, evidence, or ethics are as abundantly available today as they were at the time of Beauvoir's writing. Other characters she describes tend to realise the fact that values are freely chosen but instead of choosing them themselves, subsume their freedom in the pursuit of either a 'cause' or their own glory. The 'serious man', for example, calms their anxiety in the face of freedom by denying their transcendence, they seek to become one thing: a professor, a model, a parent, outside of the object into which their freedom is subsumed – the professor outside their speciality, the model beyond the world of fashion, the parent away from her children – they lapse readily into the sub-man's penchant for grabbing the ready-made values of others.

The point with all of these characters is that they fail to assume both the ambiguity of their existence and the freedom of others. For Beauvoir genuine freedom does not simply will individual freedom but rather the expansion of all freedom in order to grow the possibilities of all humans: "The freedom of other men must be respected and they must be helped to free themselves. Such a law imposes limits upon action and at the same time immediately gives it a content" (65).

Genuine freedom, for Beauvoir, is one which destines itself towards the existence of others without wishing to trap them in the in-itself. That is without reducing them to a label, definition, or membership of a group while recognising that all existences are formed by myriad relations including those that emerge through group membership. In other words, genuine freedom wills an ever-expanding freedom for all – this universal aim recognises the particular ways in which freedom realises itself in the freely chosen and multiple identities of others.[6]

Of course, freedom is an often-misused word. In 1947 Beauvoir could write: "When a party promises the directing classes that it will defend their freedom, it means quite plainly that it will demand they have the freedom of exploiting the working class" (97). Similarly, when political leaders 'worry' about following EU directives that protect workers' rights yet 'hinder' free entrepreneurship, they 'worry' about the freedom of some to use and deny the freedom of others.

Freedom, genuinely understood, is the human condition of ambiguity between transcendence and facticity. It is the only value through which all values gain their significance. Each time we deny freedom to one we deny freedom, that is, existence, itself. In doing so, we narrow the possibilities of humanity. How then does this account map onto an account of language or translation?

II

In her 2004 work *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: Dictionnaire des intraduisibles* Barbara Cassin celebrates differences between various European languages as philosophical opportunities. The untranslatable here is understood as that which 'one keeps on (not)

translating' – that is, the untranslatable is what complicates the universal and sets conceptual invention in motion. Taking inspiration from Émile Benveniste's *Vocabulaire des Institutions Indo-Européen* (1969), the project takes words as points of entry to semantic networks and then maps these networks onto similar semantic networks in other languages. The idea is not to give a simple translation or definition of, say, Hegel's *aufheben*; but rather to show how this word functions within Hegel's philosophy in relation to other words and how the shift into, for example French, entails a corresponding network of related terms.

At the heart of the project is the aim to show that a philosophical concept cannot be entirely cut off from the language of its word. There is an overall celebration of the multiplicity inherent and necessary to language; a multiplicity that takes three forms: Firstly, that there are many languages. Following both Wilhelm von Humboldt and Jacques Derrida, Cassin argues that there is no such a thing as 'language' but only languages (*Dictionary* ix, "Translation as Politics" 6). Each language acts like a net overlapping with other nets that capture the world, providing different perspectives on the same thing while simultaneously constituting that thing. We may speak of universal concepts only through particular languages, which invariably bring their own colour or shade to the concept in question – this colour of the particular on the universal is not inconsequential.

Secondly, there is multiplicity within a single language. Meanings change over history and across contexts; the *Dictionary of Untranslatables* deals with meanings in particular texts at particular times providing both a diachronic history of concepts as they change in their various linguistic crossings, while also providing a synchronic account of the current philosophical landscape. As such, the *Dictionary* is not a finished work but an ongoing and interminable project.

Thirdly and finally, there is multiplicity within a single word – double and triple meanings, homonyms and homophones, polysemic play and historical traces. As such concepts – necessarily entangled in a particular tongue – emerge as clusters of thoughts.

The *Dictionary* is viewed by Cassin as entailing a political ambition, namely "to ensure the languages of Europe are taken into account". This desire to protect the multilingual condition of Europe comes into relief against two contrary, yet equally opposing, positions. The first position Cassin describes as a "logical universalism indifferent to languages" (*Dictionary* 19). This position takes the form of translating everything into English – not the English of William Shakespeare or Carol Ann Duffy, Hilary Mantel or James Joyce – but 'official English', 'globish' as Cassin terms it, following a former IBM manager. She does not dispute the bureaucratic need for a common medium but, ironically noting that at international meetings "'real' English speakers are those that [non-native speakers have] the most difficulty under-standing!" (*Dictionary* xviii). Cassin argues that this is not a real language but rather the language of the technocrat and the market; English as a second language, an instru-mental language like Latin and French once were.

Yet there is particular philosophical danger in translating everything into this 'auxiliary international language' as Umberto Eco describes English. In philosophy English has a particular and paradoxical heritage that is not inseparable from the phenomenon of English as the language of Empire, both the historical British empire and the contemporary global market empire of predominantly Anglo-American corporations such as Google, Microsoft, Amazon and so on ("Translation as Politics" 4). Here English is understood along the lines of two universalist aspirations. On the one hand, as Cassin argues, there remains a certain strand of analytic philosophy (with all the problems of this term) that thinks "philosophy relates only to a universal logic, identical in all times and all places – for Aristotle, for my colleague at Oxford" (*Dictionary* xviiii). In this vein, the language of the concept – here English – matters little. Yet, along with this goes another strangely contradictory assumption: that English in its particularity is the language of "common sense and shared experience" hence the requisite language for thinking clearly:

"The whole Anglo-Saxon tradition has devoted itself to the exclusion of jargon, of esoteric language, to the puncturing of the windbags of metaphysics. […] The presumption of a rationality that belongs to angels rather than humans and a militant insistence on ordinary language combine to support a prevalence of English that becomes in the worst of cases, a refusal of the status of philosophy to Continental philosophy, which is mired in the contingencies of history and individual languages" (*Dictionary* xviii)

According to this way of thinking untranslatability is a non-issue – everything is accessible and what is not has no value ("Translation as Politics" 4).[7]

The second position against which Cassin defines the project of a dictionary of untranslatables is that of an "ontological nationalism essentializing the spirit of languages" (*Dictionary* xviii). Such a position finds its roots in Herder's account of German as the language of translation or rather of translation as the national character of the German language – its capacity to imitate and bend towards and with what is other. This German exceptionalism reaches, perhaps, its climax in Martin Heidegger's account of Greek as philosophical in its core and comparable in this regard only to German:

"The same applies to every genuine language, in a different degree to be sure. The extent to which this is so depends on the depth and power of the people and race who speak the language and exist within it. Only the German language has a depth and a creative philosophical character to compare with the Greek" (36 cited in Cassin "Translation as Politics" 5).

This ontological nationalism, argues Cassin following Lefebvre, makes untranslatability the very criterion of truth – there is a sacralisation of the untranslatable.

Both of these positions – logical universalism and ontological nationalism – are at odds with Cassin's aim to view the untranslatable as a philosophically productive moment that reminds us to take a step back to check our understanding; to realise that ambiguity leads to questions which lead to creativity, dialogue and exchange.

III

Our current political climate is characterised by the oppression of reducing people to their facticity – to their nationality, skin colour, religion, gender, and so on – and thereby denying their freedom by denying their ambiguity. Neither Cassin nor Beauvoir deny the universal – either as a concept or as an ethical law – rather they do not shrink human experience to merely the universal but take it as that which emerges through the play of multiple particularities. Bringing Cassin and Beauvoir together we might think of people as languages who emerge only in their relations to others. Their meaning is defined not only by themselves but by the network through which they discover themselves and project a shared future. The untranslatable understood here in Beauvoir's terms as the ambiguity of human existence which nonetheless makes that existence possible, forces us to consider the particular of any universal. Taking Cassin's idea that the untranslatable is what we 'keep on (not) translating' we can view the untranslatable as the particularity of any individual person which necessarily exceeds our capacity to fully understand them. By introducing this idea of the untranslatable other to political discourse, we can pause its tendency towards a reductive universalism just long enough to remind ourselves of our particular ethical obligations to each other.

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Notes

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Annual Society for Women in Philosophy – Ireland Conference in May 2018.

[2] In doing this the far-right often removes the names of individuals reducing them to their group membership only. Judith Butler argues that removing the name of the other, and in particular removing the right to publicly name the other results in removing the right to mourn the other. Her example notes the 'ungrevability' of Palestinian and Afghan victims of the Israeli and United States' armies respectively. See Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) and Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004).

[3] The idea would be structurally similar to Saren Kierkegaard's 'teleological suspension of the ethical' insofar as this ethical suspension of the political would suspend the political order to make possible an ethical event. However, the understanding here of ethical is closer to that described by Emmanuel Levinas than that of Kierkegaard for whom 'ethical' is closer to a kind of moral code. In fact, the ethical in Levinas would perhaps be better understood as what is called 'religious' in Kierkegaard. Unfortunately, there is not the space here to describe in detail these different understandings of 'ethical', 'religious' and 'political'.

[4] Lecture notes from the 1960s (not all delivered) provide a 'better' account of Sartrean ethics concerning the 'integral man' and the 'subhuman' although the connection between these and Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity* does not appear to have been made clear. This builds on the dialectical history of Sartre's 'second' period. See *Notebook for an Ethics* (1992) [1983]. Trans. by David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[5] "One does not offer an ethics to a God" (Beauvoir, 9). That is, it is by non-coincidence with herself that the human has the possibility of failure – ' no failure, no ethics' – the paradox of Hegel's system being that it is through the gap between the moral and the natural law that the moral law can emerge, if it eventually won out there would be no need for morality: "there can be a having-to-be only for a being who […] questions himself in his being, a being who is at a distance from himself and who has to be his being."

[6] "Thus we see that no existence can be validly fulfilled if it is limited to itself. It appeals to the existence of others" (Beauvoir 72), also: "with each step forward the horizon recedes a step; for man it is a matter of pursuing the expansion of his existence and of retrieving this very effort as an absolute" (85)

[7] Elsewhere Cassin notes that philosophy sees the ethical entering language through meaning understood as consensus which necessarily entails exclusion (but an exclusion that remains unacknowledged): "the same type of undesirable others to be excluded, to be forced to exclude themselves from humanity. Thus, meaning, understood as a transcendental necessity, that is as a condition of possibility of human language, is supported by, and only by, an exclusion no less transcendental than the necessity itself. Or simply: common sense, being both sense and common, produces nonsense and senseless agents, noncommonality and inhumanity" (*Sophistical Practice* 44-5).

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Untranslatability and the Cold War: Theory in Context

BRIAN JAMES BAER

Any discussion of the concept of untranslatability must begin with the caveat that what is meant by the term fluctuates wildly. In some cases, it is used to suggest that something *cannot* be translated, in others, that it *should not* be translated, and in still others, that it traditionally *has not* been translated. For example, in the nineteenth century anglophone journal *The China Review*, in a review of Stanislas Julien's *Syntaxe nouvelle de la langue chinoise,* the Scottish sinologist Alexander Falconer (1872-73, 115) mentions certain Chinese characters that serve as "case particles, especially as signs of the accusative." "These characters," Falconer notes, "when not employed as prepositions or illative particles are exceedingly difficult to translate, and are often untranslatable" (115). Here, Falconer appears to use untranslatable to mean "untranslated"—which makes untranslatability more of an empirical fact than an inherent linguistic quality or essential feature. Furthermore, untranslatability for Falconer is indexed by omission. In Barbara Cassin's (Cassin xix) more recent discussion of the topic, however, untranslatability is manifested in the borrowing of key terms rather than in their omission, non-translation as opposed to zero translation, while in Emily Apter's construal, untranslatability is the effect of a "'intransigent' nub of meaning" that resists translation (Apter 235), which can be manifested either as non-translation or zero-translation.

The historical study of untranslatability is further complicated by the fact that many contemporary scholars often impose the term onto theoretical positions in which the term is not explicitly invoked. For example, Sergei Fokin (2016) describes early Soviet translation theory as concerned with untranslatability (*neperevodimost'*). None of the theorists mentioned, however, used the term. Rather, they discuss situations in which, due to the incommensurability of natural languages at all levels, literal translation or translation that employs similar linguistic means is not possible. Labeling such instances as untranslatable conflates incommensurability with untranslatability. This, in turn, construes untrans–latability's opposite, translatability, as transposability or unproblematic linguistic subs–titution, a view of translation that greatly circumscribes the translator's agency insofar as incommensurability suggests the need for heightened creativity on the translator's part, as in Jakobson's "creative transposition," whereas untranslatability implies abject surrender. Finally, to the extent that claims of untranslatability rest on an assertion of "fundamental difference, whether genetic or historical," they may, as Eric Hayot suggests, "reproduce the worst habits of Eurocentric thought" (Hayot 1414).

So, rather than dwell on what untranslatability "is", which risks presenting it not only as "transhistorical" (Fani 2020, 5) but as an exercise of the Western epistemic privilege (Mignolo 2012, ix) of presenting "the habits of Eurocentric thought" as universal, I will focus on how the term was operationalized, and in certain cases weaponized, in the context of the Cold War, which John J. Curley (2018, 8) describes as "the central story of the second half of the twentieth century—essential for explaining what happened around the world and why." Indeed, the influence of the Cold War was felt everywhere. As Curley (2018, 8) goes on to note, "Even disputes that, at their start, had little or nothing to do with the Cold War, morphed into important battlegrounds for the conflict." Or, as U.S. poet Robert Frost put it, "I was sometimes like that as a boy with another boy I lived in antipathy with. It clouded my days" (Frost 2007, 231).

Not surprisingly, the ideological incommensurability of the world views or master narratives represented by the two opposing superpowers and embodied in Winston Churchill's image of an impenetrable iron curtain gave the notion of untranslatability particular salience. That being said, the conceptualization of untranslatability in the Cold War context was by no means universal, as it developed differently in different contexts, nor was it static. In order to understand the different valences given to untranslatability in the Cold War, I will examine three distinct contexts: the Soviet context of the nineteen fifties, the US context of the nineteen fifties, focusing on the Russian emigrés Roman Jakobson, Vladimir Nabokov, and Vladimir Vedle, and the post-Cold War context of the Global North.

Untranslatability in the Cold War Soviet Context

In the pre-war period, many Soviet translation theorists focused on the asymmetries between natural languages to argue against literal translation and to assert the fundamental creativity of the translator's task, which will always involve selecting from a range of possible solutions. Rather than relegating such asymmetries to the realm of exception, as instances of untranslatability, these theorists established those asymmetries as the very condition of translatability. Andrei Fedorov makes this point quite explicitly in a chapter titled "The Question of Translatability" from his 1941 monograph *On Literary Translation*:

> Rendering the specific features of the syntax of a foreign language, folk sayings, axioms, idioms, images that are characteristic of the individual style of the author being translated, recreating differences in the stylistic coloring of words and phrases, the difference between bookish and the colloquial language of various social groups, differences in the age of words, and differences between old and new language—all these are cases of everyday translation practice, cases that any translator will encounter. (Fedorov 1941, 207)

Back in the late 1920s, Fedorov had provided a more systematic theoretical elaboration for this position in an article entitled "The Problem of Verse Translation" (1927), in which he applies the Formalist concepts of system and function developed by his mentor Iurii Tynianov to translation. Fedorov claims that a literary text, characterized by the inseparability of form and content, is a complex systems of interconnected elements, which he will later describe as a "chemical compound" (Fedorov 1930, 206), so that when any one element is altered, which inevitably occurs in translation due to the asymmetry of languages, the entire system is changed. Hence, translation can establish a relationship of "likeness" (*podobie*) to the source text but never one of "sameness" (*tozhdestvo*).

The xenophobia and paranoia that characterized the early Cold War years in the Soviet context, culminated in the campaign against "cosmopolitanism," which targeted foreign influences of all kinds and had a distinctly anti-Semitic element. The use of foreign words or borrowings became an especially popular object of attack at that time. It was in this context that Fedorov published his *Introduction to Translation Theory* (1953) in which, for the first time, he introduced the notion of "untranslatability," projecting it onto the West as a fallacy produced by "idealist philosophy," which, unlike Marxist philosophy of language, posited a distinction between thought and language. Fedorov then invokes the Soviet rhetoric of optimism to describe the Soviet position on translatability, namely, that all things are translatable if you accept that the translation may not be formally equivalent, meaning that it may not render a noun with a noun, a verb with a verb, and so on. Western writing on translation, on the other hand, is characterized by deep pessimism over the possibility of producing what Fedorov refers to as a "full value" translation, that is, one that need not be inferior to the original that pessimism, Fedorov argues, that is manifested in frequent claims of untranslatability. While untranslatability is absent from Fedorov's previous work, it appears in five of the eight chapters of his 1953 *Introduction to Translation Theory,* where is it very clearly mapped onto Cold War binaries.

Untranslatability in the Anglophone Cold War Context

While Soviet writings on translation began soon after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, increasing steadily throughout the twenties, thirties and forties, Western thinking on translation really took off after the Second World War. Before that, attention to translation was at best "incidental and desultory" (Holmes 1988 [1972], 173). Without a firm theoretical foundation to rely on, Western thinking on translation in the post-war years was greatly influenced by the recent experience of translation during the war, in particular, the successful breaking of the Nazi secret code, a model reinforced in emergent writing on machine translation. The degree to which this translation model captured the popular imagination in the Anglophone West in the post-War years is evident in Winston Churchill's description of the art of painting from his *Painting as Pastime* of 1948:

> The canvas receives a message dispatched usually a few seconds before from the natural object. But it has to come through a post office en route. It has been transmitted in code. It has been turned from light into paint. It reaches the canvas [as] a cryptogram. Not until it has been placed in its correct relation to everything else that is on the canvas can it be deciphered, is its meaning apparent, is it *translated* once again from meter pigment into light. (qtd. in Curley 2018, 14; italics added)

The model of translation as code-breaking was predicated on the easy separation of form from content, a peeling away of the outer shell of the form in order to extract the core meaning. This is evident in the 1958 volume *Aspects of Translation*. As A. H. Smith (1958, vii) writes in the preface: "To translate is, as Dr. Johnson defined it, 'to change into another language, retaining sense'. It would, perhaps, be wiser to qualify this definition, and suggest that to translate is to change into another language, retaining as much of the sense as one can; for some of the original effect is almost always lost." This privileging of sense is evident too in the introduction by Leonard Forster (1958, 1; italics added): "I want to consider translation as the transference of the content of a text from one language to another, bearing in mind that we *cannot always* dissociate the content from the form"— *not always* suggests that it can be done most of the time.

In other words, while the Cold War manufactured "fundamental difference," it also promoted utopian fantasies of science transcending difference, as evident in early writings on machine translation, in achievements in space travel, and in the "deep structures" of Chomskian linguistics. That utopian post-war model of transposability informed political thinking of the time as well, specifically in regard to the founding of global institutions, such as the United Nations, meant to avoid future wars. As the Nigerian poet and playwright stated in regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948: "All that this document requires therefore is simply that it be rendered in all the accessible languages of all societies" (qtd. in Slaughter 2007, 6). A similar tone is struck by poet W.H. Auden in a 1950 review of a volume of Greek poetry in translation: "Every translator is an international agent of goodwill" (Auden 1950, 183).

This utopian vision of translation as transposability soon engendered a backlash, however, as expressed in increasingly absolute claims for the untranslatability of poetry, claims predicated on the inseparability of form and content. This was expressed by Robert Frost in his 1957 "Message to the Poets of Korea," written only a few years after the armistice was signed ending the hottest conflict of the Cold War: "The language barrier has so much to do with individuality and originality that we wouldn't want to see it removed. We must content ourselves with seeing it more or less got over by interpretation and translation. We must remember that one may be national without being poetical, but one can't be poetical without being national" (Frost 2007, 182). This is a position poet

Peter Robinson describes as reflecting "the spirit of the Cold War" to the extent that it is characterized by a "linguistic essentialism" (Robinson 2014, 25). In that regard, it is important to remember that while most of the work of Sapir and Whorf on linguistic relativity was published in the thirties and forties, the phrase "the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis" was coined in the fifties, a sign of the concept's new relevance in the context of the Cold War.

The dichotomy of art and science that was emerging in the Anglophone Cold War context was reified in C.P. Snow's now famous lecture of 1959, "The Two Cultures," in which he lamented the increasing hermeticism of scientific and humanistic cultures, another manifestation of the Cold War obsession with incommensurability. In that same year, Roman Jakobson published his seminal essay "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," which presents two, almost diametrically opposed, visions of translation. In the first few pages Jakobson makes the argument that anything can be translated, albeit by alternative linguistic means, or, as Jakobson expressed it: "Languages differ essentially in what they *must* convey and not in what they *may* convey" (1959, 236). This is a position that is perfectly consonant with Soviet writings on translation, which should come as no surprise, as Jakobson was a founding member of Russian Formalism and worked very closely with Fedorov's mentor Iurii Tynianov, even after Jakobson's emigration to Prague. In fact, he and Tynianov co-authored a seminal work of Formalist scholarship, the essay "Problems in the Study of Literature and Language" (1928). In that first section of the 1959 essay, Jakobson appears to dismiss claims of untranslatability based on linguistic relativity: "Both the practice and the theory of translation abound with intricacies, and from time to time attempts are made to sever the Gordian knot by proclaiming the dogma of untranslatability" (1959, 234).

Jakobson then goes on to discuss instances in which the form is very closely connected to the meaning, as with allegorical figures whose biological gender is often a reflection of the word's grammatical gender, which may be different in different languages. He ends with a discussion of the semantics of phonetics and of paronomasia, which are characteristic of poetry, leading him to proclaim that such works require "creative transposition." His complete avoidance of the word translation here is striking and represents a divergence from Soviet positions. Is this or is this not a form of translation? If it is, then does the use of the adjective "creative" suggest that the translation described in the first part of the essay requires no creativity, again a position that is distinct from that of Soviet scholars, who held that the asymmetry of languages will present the translator with an array of options and that the selection and coordination of those options is a highly creative task. If transposition is not translation, then isn't this a somewhat obfuscated claim of untranslatability, which would again place him at odds with the Soviets? Jakobson kept abreast of Soviet scholarship and may have been aware of the charge made by Fedorov and others that untranslatability was an idealist fallacy.

Around that same time, Jakobson's fellow emigré Vladimr Nabokov was contemplating the possibility of what Fedorov termed a "full value translation," that is, one that did justice both to the form and to the content of the original, in regard to his project of translating what is often described as the greatest work of modern Russian literature, Alexander Pushkin's novel in verse *Eugene Onegin*. Indeed, as Nabokov writes in his biographical note on Pushkin in a 1944 collection of translations: "It seems unnecessary to remind the reader that Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837) was Russia's greatest poet but it may be preferable not to take any chances" (1944, 37). While reading any one essay by Nabokov gives the impression that his positions, which are always expressed with immense self-assurance, were static and fully formed, they in fact underwent an evolution in the Cold War context, which can be traced from his collection of translations, *Three Russian Poets: Pushkin, Lermontov and Tyutchev*, of 1944, through his 1955 essay "Problems of Translation: 'Onegin' in English," to the actual foreword to his translation of *Eugene Onegin*, which was published in 1964.

The 1944 collection, which includes no introduction by the translator, only biographical notes at the end, contains translations of short lyric poems by three of Russia's greatest poets of the nineteenth century, Alexander Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, and Fyodor Tyutchev. All the translations are rhymed and metered, and no mention is made of translation, although Nabokov does take the opportunity in the biographical notes to criticize any attempt to limit the creative autonomy of the poet, be it by the "grossly uncultured Tsar," "the well meaning critics of the civic school that dominated public opinion in the Sixties and Seventies," or by "Marxism" (1944, 37).

Nabokov's essay of 1955 indicates that Nabokov had moved away from producing rhymed and metered translations of Russian poetry as he worked on translating *Eugene Onegin*, which led him to advocate for "literal translation," describing the phrase as "tautological since anything but is not truly a translation but an imitation, an adaptation or a parody" (2010, 77). This was a position completely antithetical to Soviet positions, which rejected literalism as inaccurate, associating it with "mechanical carrying over" (Fedorov 1953, 280). Nabokov arrives at this position by acknowledging the inseparability of form and content in poetic works:

> The problem, then, is a choice between rhyme and reason: can a translation while rendering with absolute fidelity the whole text, and nothing but the text, keep the form of the original, its rhythm and rhyme? To the artist whom practice within the limits of one language, his own, has convinced that matter and manner are one, it comes as a shock to discover that a work of art can present itself to the would-be translator as split into form and content, and that the question of rendering one but not the other may arise at all. Actually what happens is still a monist's delight: shorn of its primary verbal existence, the original text will not be able to soar and to sing; but it can be very nicely dissected and mounted, and scientifically studied in all its organic details. (2010, 77).

Here, Nabokov, the lepidopterist, advocates for mounting and dissecting the original in translation in order to study it. He then goes on to illustrate his literal translation approach with two verses from *Onegin* which he describes sarcastically as "untranslatable"—placing untranslatable in quotation marks as his literal approach is, he argues, the only viable method of translation.

By the time the translation is finally published, in 1964, Nabokov will nuance his position by proposing a tri-partite typology of translation approaches, situating literal translation between paraphrastic and lexical, and stating his position on verse translation in a more unequivocal manner: "We are now in a position to word our question more accurately: can a rhymed poem like *Eugene Onegin* be truly translated with the retention of its rhymes? The answer, of course, is no. To reproduce the rhymes and yet translate the entire poem literally is mathematically impossible" (1964, ix).

One can point to a number of overlapping Cold War contexts shaping the evolution of Nabokov's views on the translation of poetry. Most obviously, as an immigrant displaced by the war, Nabokov found work in a department of foreign languages; the need to provide a translation for his students was a major factor behind his translation of *Eugene Onegin*, as he mentions in his foreword: "The writing of the book now in the hands of the reader was prompted about 1950, in Ithaca, New York, by the urgent needs of my Russian-literature class at Cornell and the nonexistence of any true translation of *Eugene Onegin* into English" (1964, xi). In a broader sense, however, the experience of involuntary exile may have led him to construe the untranslatable original as a metaphor for an irretrievable homeland—the Russia he knew as a child was not only far away geographically, it was also, following the Bolshevik Revolution, a thing of the past. The entangling of geographic and temporal displacement appears again and again in Nabokov's work, most hauntingly perhaps in the opening pages of his autobiography *Speak, Memory,* written shortly after

the war but dealing with his life before the war, "with only a few sallies into later space-time" (1966, 8). He opens the autobiography with a description of the panic he felt when seeing a home movie taken of his family before his birth, with an empty baby carriage in front of the house. This conflation of temporal and geographic or physical displacement is connected more directly with translation, however, in the postscript Nabokov wrote for his Russian translation of *Lolita*, his first major work written in English, the success of which allowed him to quit his job at Cornell. In that postscript, he asks himself who he is translating the novel for—as the novel could never be published in the Soviet Union, there was no way for his *Lolita* to return "home" in translation; he then imagines a sorry group of Russian emigrés sitting in a café in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, as the only possible readers of the translation. For the emigré writer, translation is an act of geographic and temporal displacement done for readers who are themselves temporally and geographically displaced.

The connection between untranslatability and exile is more explicitly expressed by a fellow Russian emigré Vladimir Vedle in an essay from 1960 entitled "On the Untranslatable," in which a discussion of the untranslatability of verse ends with a mention of two poems by Pushkin that conflate geographic and temporal displacement:

> When translation deals with a poem, where sound and sense are inseparably linked in a whole from the first line to the last, which gives the impression (which is impossible to definitively verify), that not only can one not alter a single word, one cannot alter even a single vowel or consonant. In dramatic or epic poetry (not to mention prose), […] there is a thematic basis which allows for translation "with one's native words," and therefore can be rendered without much difficulty into a literate translation. There is an untranslatable remnant here as well, but to analyze those remnants it is better to examine poems that are entirely or almost entirely composed of such a remnant and that, like "On the Hills of Georgia" or "Under the Blue Skies of One's Native Land," can never be rendered into "own's native words." (1973, 148-149)

The first poem mentioned was written in 1827 when Pushkin was traveling outside Russia proper, in the Caucasus region, revisiting the site of his internal exile, while the other was written in 1826 in memory of a former lover, Amaliia Riznich, whom he had met during his Southern exile and who later died of tuberculosis while in Florence. Both poems connect reminiscence and loss, forms of temporal displacement, with geographic displacement.

Another way the Cold War context influenced Nabokov's view of the translation of poetry was through his increasingly antagonistic relationship with Roman Jakobson over the course of the nineteen fifties, largely on political grounds—Nabokov felt Jakobson was not sufficiently anti-Soviet. This may have led Nabokov to assume a position on translation that was distinctly different from Jakobson's "creative transposition," which in Nabokov's typology would fit under paraphrase (see Baer 2011). But, in a broader sense, Nabokov's position on the impossibility of verse translation, often described as idiosyncratic, was in fact aligned with the views of his contemporaries, such as Frost and Jakobson, who constructed poetry as a bastion of humanism against a rising tide of scientific positivism and a model of translation as universal transposability.

Conclusion: Untranslatability in the Post–Cold War World

It may seem strange to include discussions of untranslatability from the 2010s in an article about the Cold War, but the Cold War casts a very long shadow. When the initial euphoria over the fall of communism wore off, the "end of history" began to look more like the return of the repressed. As Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes comment:

> In the aftermath of 1989, the global spread of democracy was envisioned as a version of the fairy tale of Sleeping Beauty, where the Prince of Freedom only needed to slay the Dragon of Tyranny and kiss the princess in order to awaken a previously dormant liberal majority.

But the kiss proved bitter, and the revived majority turned out to be more resentful and less liberal than had been expected or hoped (2019, 20)

They might have added that the Prince of Freedom too turned out to be more resentful and less liberal that most pundits and pollsters imagined. (Unfortunately, Krastev and Holmes tend to blame the failed transition on Eastern Europeans rather than considering the effects of Western monetary policy and political pressure.)

In any case, these two periods in the post-Cold War—the period of euphoria and the period of disenchantment—were reflected in writings on translation that appeared in the Global North. The nineties saw a boom in the use of translation as a metaphor for migration and global movement, most notably in the work of Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall, unburdened by any consideration of the messiness and expense of actual (interlingual) translation (see Baer 2020). The second period, that of disenchantment, was signaled, one could say, by Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* (2000), which looked at translation in the other direction—from the metropole to the global periphery—as a way to challenge the universal claims of Western theory and to lend agency to the (interlingual) translators of that theory. Indeed, my own research on book reviews of translated literature in the New York Times saw a pronounced shift in the tone of translation criticism in 2000, toward greater pessimism about the possibility of translation, alongside an obsession with works dealing with the Cold War and its aftermath (see Baer 2017a). This was also the time when the memoir of the East German transvestite Charlotte von Mahlsdorf was repackaged for Western audiences. What had initially been marketed as a feel-good story of emancipation in the 1995 English translation of the memoir, *I Am My Own Woman,* was turned into a gloomy tale of corruption and betrayal in Doug Wright's play, *I Am My Own Wife* (2004) (see Baer 2017b). So, the fact that Cassin's and Apter's work on untranslatability appeared in that specific post-Cold War context of disenchantment and pessimism, which saw the rise of ethno-nationalist authoritarianism across the world, should invite a critical examination of whether such claims of untranslatability—especially Apter's essentialist construal—are more symptoms of our cultural malaise than they are constructive interventions.

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Untranslatability: The Rebirth of Theory?

BYRON TAYLOR

Abstract: Using Galin Tihanov's recent remarks on World Literature as my point of departure, this paper suggests that the recent theme of untranslatability may, counter-intuitively, be as useful for Translation Studies as it is for Comparative Literature. After outlining Emily Apter's contribution to this area and Lawrence Venuti's subsequent response, I go on to suggest that the notion of the 'untranslatable' can be highly innovative for research and pedagogy, specifically in the field of what is usually deemed literary theory. This reinforces the mutual dependency and insight that either disciplines can afford each other.

Keywords: Untranslatability, translation studies, comparative literature, world literature, Emily Apter, Lawrence Venuti

Theory is a mandatory component in literary and translation departments around the world. It is being taught in classrooms every year. The word derives from the Greek word *theôria*, meaning 'contemplation' or 'speculation,' a word which itself derives from *theôros*, meaning 'spectator.' This optical aspect designates theory as a means 'to see' or 'to look upon something' in a different way. However, the overwhelming majority of students in classes on theory do not know this; at the very least, they are not being taught the skills to be *able* to learn such things. In what follows, I will suggest that untranslatability provides the logical next step in the teaching of theory, so that such skills become an inherent part of its development.

As I will go on to argue, notions of untranslatability could provide theory with a new lease of life. One that engages students in ways that are more proactive and demanding, and that ultimately cast light on the urgent centrality of translation to the humanities. Beginning with Galin Tihanov's recent remarks on what he considers the dilemma of World Literature, I will go on to explain the ongoing debate on untranslatability, with reference to its proponents as well as its adherents, before suggesting a pedagogical methodology by which the claims of both are proven and a new dimension of mutual dialogue is opened in Comparative Literature and Translation Studies.

I begin with Galin Tihanov, whose body of work has carried out extensive treatments of German, Russian and Eastern European intellectual history and culture. In '*The Birth and Death of Literary Theory*' (2019), Tihanov locates interwar Eastern and Central Europe as its birthplace. He goes on to elegantly systematise the Russian contribution to literary theory through what he refers to as 'a regime of relevance':

> 'The history of ideas about literature can be told as the history of attempts to conceptualise the changing regimes of its relevance. By "regime of relevance" […] I mean the prevalent mode of appropriating (both interpreting and using) literature in society at a particular time. Any such regime or mode is in competition with others, and at any one point a constellation of different regimes is available, shaped by a plethora of factors […].[1]

While we ourselves may be forced to acknowledge that literature 'is no longer endowed with special status,' Tihanov continues, as it must compete 'for attention as one of the many commodities of the leisure industry,'[2] he argues for the contribution of the Russian

Formalists to be reconciled with the broader importance of theory, and for theory itself to assume a more historical character in our analysis of it: 'For the historian of intellectual formations, radical historicity is the only credible approach; I would even submit that our understanding of literary theory has been greatly skewed and impoverished by our reluctance to historicise it.'[3] This is a significant claim, one we will later come back to.

'Literariness,' or *literaturnost*, was introduced by Roman Jackobson in 1921, who claimed that 'the object of literary science is not literature but literariness, i.e. what makes a given work a literary work.'[4] It was a concept that would come to define the Formalist movement, and Viktor Shlovsky would later develop this notion into the idea of *ostranenie*, or 'estrangement,' suggesting that what makes writing conform to the status of literature was its ability to estrange everyday language. It referred to the difficult-to-define feature that made writing *literature*, a formal property on which much of their varied debates and writings would converge.

Yet, however linear 'The Birth and Death of Literary Theory' (2019) may sound as a title, its conclusions are far more circular. After a series of close analyses of how Russian Formalists like Viktor Shlovsky and Boris Eikenbaum recognised 'the autonomy of literature' as an art form alongside 'its presumed "literariness," embedded in the workings of language,'[5] Tihanov ends his book by bringing this debate back to the present, laying his findings at the feet of World Literature. With a certain disparagement, he claims that World Literature 'usually refers to a particular liberal Anglo-Saxon discourse grounded in assumptions of mobility, transparency, and a recontextualising (but also decontextualizing) circulation that supports the free consumption and unrestricted comparison of literary artefacts.'[6] As Tihanov sees it, World Literature, as promoted by scholars like Pascale Casanova, David Damrosch and Franco Moretti, is, in actuality, a discipline underpinned by the same dilemma as its Russian forebearers:

> Let me repeat: the current discourse on "world literature" is an iteration of the principal question of modern literary theory at the time of its birth: should one think literature within or beyond the horizon of language? This specific iteration recasts this question, while retaining its theoretical momentum. [Shklovsky and Eikenbaum] both faced the foundational conundrum of literary theory: how to account for literariness with reference to both individual languages and language *per se*; if this response was to be seminal in terms of theory, it had to be a response that addressed both the singularity of language (the language of the original) and its multiplicity (the multiple languages in which a literary text reaches its potential audiences in translation).[7]

In other words, it is impossible to think of literature theoretically without accounting for translation. This a point that should not be overstated. What began as an aspect of Formalist thinking a century ago, according to Tihaov, is now redefined as the grounding principle for a discipline with a broader global and historical circumference:

> 'The Anglo-Saxon discourse on world literature, foremost in the works of David Damrosch, has proceeded – or so it seems to me – in the steps of Shklovsky by foregrounding the legitimacy of working in translation. Damrosch has implicitly confronted the tension between the singularity and multiplicity of language by concluding that studying a literary work in the languages of its socialisation is more important than studying it in the language of its production, not least because this new priority restricts and undermines the monopoly of methodological nationalism in literary studies.'[8]

Conclusively, Tihanov positions translation as the key issue of theory in our present century, foregrounding its importance for the future of Comparative Literature and Translation Studies alike.[9] Subscribing to his assumptions above means advancing his argument by way of a concept that has received increasing attention in recent years – yet, on the face of it, appears to dismantle the priority of translation altogether - untranslatability.

With reference to Barbara Cassin and Emily Apter's projects on untranslatability, their broad reception, and their response from Lawrence Venuti, I will outline in the following pages how this debate has developed, pointing out the ways its interpretations differ (sometimes dramatically). However, I will salvage amongst this debate some points of overlap that have been sorely overlooked. I will suggest in what follows that untranslatability could well provide the logical next step for literary theory, in a move with potential benefits for Comparative Literature, World Literature, foreign language-learning and Translation Studies. I will suggest that adopting certain methodologies (in classrooms and syllabi) could lead to these disciplines benefitting from the intervention of untranslatability, in ways that rejuvenate them, reviving fresh dialogue, collaboration and correspondence between them.

Untranslatability

First, however, that negative prefix deserves our consideration. How can we better define what the 'untranslatable' negates? Is language ever, in fact, 'untranslatable'? Translation, one could counter-argue, is something we do every day. In this sense, it is less a skill than a reflex. Every time we read a text or hear a statement made we are engaged in a process of interpretation as we translate it into something appropriative to ourselves.

Translation Studies has risen from a derivative, neglected role in previous centuries, to become, in the 21st, an area of unprecedented growth and demand in the Anglo-Western academy, acquiring leading scholars like Susan Bassnett, Antoine Berman, Anthony Pym and Lawrence Venuti along the way. Yet the discipline has clearly reached the maturity of schisms, claims Mauricio Mendonça Cardozo. Noting how it tends to be increasingly split between the literary and the technological, he asks if 'the contemporary state of' the field can 'really allow us to speak consensually of *one* real subject, of one subject that can be taken unequivocally as the *real* one'?[10]

This is a fruitful inquiry, but for present purposes another question worth posing is: what happens to the terms that *cannot* be so easily exchanged? What about the 'untranslatable' words that refuse to be assimilated into such economies, that struggle to be exchanged into the currencies of other languages? What do we do with national idioms, around which are wrapped myths by which a nation understands itself? Duncan Large has suggested that the concept of untranslatability stems from the German Romantics, and is hence – somewhat ironically - a concept older than the institution of Translation Studies itself.[11]

It was the French philosopher Barbara Cassin, leading a hundred researchers, who made the first significant leap in this direction, editing and publishing '*Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: Dictionnaire des intraduisibles*' in 2004.[12] Cassin's project was premised on providing explanations for various philosophical terms in the European tradition – words like *logos*, *ousia*, *mimesis*, *alèthia*. Words, she writes, in a definition that has earned as many critics as admirers, that are 'not what one does not translate, but what one never ceases to (not) translate.'[13] This may appear to be a curious definition of what 'untranslatability' refers to. Yet a cursory glance at the words listed above, as well as the contributors to Cassin's volume (with Alain Badiou and Ètienne Balibar among them) certifies what translators call a target-audience: those within the French and German-dominated field of Continental Philosophy. It was a book largely written by philosophers, for philosophers, while the authority of its title inevitably garnered attention from other quarters.

Yet Cassin's '*Vocabulaire*' still does not provide a solid answer as to what 'untranslatability' really means, or what 'untranslatable' words look like. Either way, Cassin's definition has satisfied some and angered others. Among the latter were those in the field of Translation Studies, many of whom are practical translators themselves.[14] This is self-evident and understandable. Surely, the idea that certain words are 'untranslatable' renders their efforts at best suspect, and at worst meaningless?

However, among those who were satisfied, and even inspired by Cassin's project and its attendant definition(s), was Emily Apter. Having established herself within the field of French and Comparative Literature, both '*Translation in a Global Market Place*' (2001) and '*The Translation Zone*' (2006) made her interests in this area clear, and her convergence with Cassin almost inevitable. In collaboration with Michael Wood and Jacques Lezra, Emily Apter was appointed to edit the English-language version of the book. It was no small feat: taking over a decade, the '*Dictionary of Untranslatables*' (2014) involved contributors ranging from linguists to translators to philosophers, from Judith Butler to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. With each word, we see its etymology, genealogy, its altering usages and philosophical purchase. It may well be one of the most important academic publications of our era.

Apter would not only oversee the book's publication, but in the process develop Cassin's project in her 2013 publication '*Against World Literature.*' Here, we see Cassin's notion travel from the sphere of philosophy to that of comparative literary criticism, without, in either case, fully landing in the designation of Translation Studies. Apter claims, in her book's opening, that its aim 'is to activate untranslatability as a theoretical fulcrum of comparative literature.'[15] Her polemical title challenges the recent branding of World Literature pushed by scholars like David Damrosch and adopts Cassin's notion of untranslatability to do so. Damrosch has famously claimed that works of World Literature are, effectively, those which travel beyond their place of origin and find reception and influence elsewhere.[16] Apter does not take issue with this idea so much as she does with its implementation. According to her, in practice, this approach ends up producing little more than a sanitised and commodified set of syllabi and a plethora of 'global' anthologies in English: falling prey 'inevitably to the tendency to zoom over the speed bumps of untranslatability in the rush to cover ground.'[17] Meanwhile, the 'untranslatable' is, in Apter's thinking, incompatible, irreducible, and in-exchangeable: therein lies its value.

She elaborates on the entries of the recently completed Dictionary, interfacing various 'untranslatable' terms with a variety of global contexts, from the checkpoints of the Gaza Strip to the translations of Karl Marx's daughter, from American author Don DeLillo to Japanese translator Hsiao-yen Peng. By tracing the previous scholarship on the topic (albeit in a largely Francophone and theoretical vein), she offers a range of 'untranslatable' terms that she argues be introduced as theoretical tools. While Tihanov's polemic rests on the idea that World Literature cannot escape its dependency on translation, her book, by contrast, 'beckons one to run the experiment of imagining what a literary studies contoured around untranslatability might be.'[18] More importantly, it aspires to make us 'think of translation as a kind of philosophy,' or as a new 'way of doing theory.'[19]

Apter and Cassin's reception

The reception of both the '*Vocabulaire*' and the '*Dictionary of Untranslatables*' has been immense, with the range of its responses emphasising its cross-disciplinary significance. Leading historian Carlo Ginzburg confessed that 'nowadays, anybody working on the history of ideas in a global perspective must take into account' Apter and Cassin's volumes.[20] However, Ginzburg also points out a weakness in their assumptions. Rereading Cassin's definition of the 'untranslatable,' Ginzburg interprets this as meaning that

> Since any translation is inevitably inadequate, the process of translation is endless. But are we allowed to assume, at some metalinguistic level, that 'incorrect translations' also exist? In the domain of everyday life the answer would undoubtedly be 'yes': let us think for a moment of the distinction between 'left' and 'right' being misinterpreted by a foreigner with poor English, walking in, let's say, New York… But if incorrect translations exist, Barbara Cassin's relativistic assumptions are untenable.[21]

In other words, Ginzburg recognises how Apter and Cassin's project unconsciously assumes there is no room for human error or contingency. From the perspective of Analytic Philosophy, Tim Crane's review claims that 'if it is a dictionary, it is closer to those of Pierre Bayle or Dr Johnson': because instead of a point of reference for future students, 'the choice and relative size of entries is eccentric. We have "demos" but not "democracy"; the very different ideas of "description" and "depiction" get a shared entry; "idea" gets a half page, "Imagination" the same. "Event" gets a quarter page, but "*Ereignis*" (as used by Heidegger) gets a page and a half.'[22] Beyond the eccentricity of its entries, Crane also takes issue with the way the book challenges the analytic establishment via more continental lines of inquiry:

> like it or not, "Anglo-analytic" philosophy dominates the academy in the US, the UK, Australasia and many parts of continental Europe; and like it or not, the French approach embodied in this dictionary is on the decline worldwide. One way to see the dictionary, then, is as an extended lament for the decline of French as a "preeminent language of philosophy."[23]

However, despite the accusations that the philosopher and the historian aim at Apter and Cassin's editions, neither can deny their importance and erudition. Still, both reviews throw light on the way in which Apter and Cassin's project does not entirely fit into the strictures of any one discipline, but rather overlap many, in ways that are contentious, fascinating and problematic. As World Literature's chief institutional architect, David Damrosch's review of '*Against World Literature'* was not as polemical as Apter's title would lead one to expect. He begins sarcastically that it 'is surely a mark of some kind of success, when a movement begins to be attacked by its own participants.'[24] While admitting that her book contains much to admire, Damrosch points out that Apter's text remains 'little engaged with current scholarship in world literature' and 'equally selective in its reference to translation studies.'[25] For Damrosch, this lack of dialogue with scholars invested in the very project Apter is addressing, somewhat weakens her broader argument: 'The tough linguistic and political analyses that Emily Apter rightly wishes comparatists to pursue will best be carried forward by widening our cultural and linguistic horizons,' inclusive of much of the Translation Studies that Apter – curiously - avoids.[26]

Duncan Large's co-edited collection '*Untranslatability'* (2018) continues the debate, from a broader set of perspectives. The criticisms of Theo Hermans and Helen Gibson raise equally valid points:

> [Apter is] treating untranslatability as that which inhibits translation, the bumps in the road which give translators occasion to pause and reflect. But if every hesitation is an index of untranslatability, this inflates the concept to an unhelpful degree.[27]

> … in favouring a "big picture" critique of how translation can create a presumptuous sense of equivalence, of "translatability" between cultures, Apter's narrative does not allow space for the ways in which individual translations are not silent parties in these debates but repeatedly engage with and provide contemporary comment on these issues in unpredictable ways.[28]

These reservations are considered, their critiques nuanced, yet commonalities between them become visible. The sheer breadth of the '*Dictionary of Untranslatables'* renders it difficult to not recognise its staggering achievement altogether, but many critics point out that there is still an underlying, glaring absence of translation analysis. Until this is rectified, these critiques imply, it is impossible to really utilise either Dictionary in the way they were intended. So how can this absence be reconciled? Is it possible to enforce this reconciliation in ways that retain Apter's original and seductive suggestion, that doing so provides 'a new way to do theory'?[29] Leaving this question in suspense a moment, I will turn firstly to the most significant critique of Apter's book, written by one of its most significantly absent sources: Lawrence Venuti.[30]

Venuti's critique

No critic thus far has offered so impassioned and so sustained an account against Apter's and Cassin's work as Venuti, who has long and eloquently postulated how translation's legitimacy is in dire need of reappraisal. Venuti's latest book, '*Contra Instrumentalism*,' (2019) finds him at his most seething. The time for 'coolly detached reasoning' on the topic is past, he claims; rather, 'the provocation of polemic has become necessary to realise and redirect it.'[31]

The book insists on a binary distinction in translation: the instrumental, and the hermeneutic. Instrumental translation is, according to Venuti, one that subscribes to the idea of 'a semantic invariant' in the text that can never be reproduced – which means that translation is always doomed to failure, into producing, at best, something of a reduced or secondary significance. Hermeneutic translation, by contrast, encapsulates what Venuti has long claimed: that the translator is a creative force in their own right, and are met at every turn with decisions that demand a broader understanding of the source-text, the place and era from which it originated. That translators therefore deserve greater creative license; and, conversely, greater appreciation for those responsibilities.

In relation to '*The Dictionary of Untranslatables*,' Venuti echoes Ginzburg when pointing out that since 'the terms are repeatedly mistranslated in Cassin's view, calling them "untranslatable" doesn't seem precise.'[32] As to the analysis of translation itself, he concludes that 'the translation analysis raises more questions than it answers.'[33] Yet the worst culprit of all is Apter. Venuti bemoans that she attempts to elevate untranslatability 'to a methodological principle, unfortunately, and the results seem misguided.'[34] Claiming that Apter's preoccupation with French theory renders her analyses retrograde, even risking 'turning back the clock in comparative literature'[35] to its Eurocentric past, Venuti goes on to explain that because 'Apter's notion of untranslatability is essentialist, it cannot enable an account of the contingencies of translation.'[36] He passionately argues that, at its simplest, 'Apter is interested in theory, not in translation,'[37] leaving 'the materiality of translation' to be 'evaporated into abstraction.'[38]

Why does he harbour such vitriol? His concern is that notions of translation as a straightforward process have been 'so deeply entrenched,' and for so long, 'as to be unconscious, knee-jerk, rote.'[39] It is this conviction to overturn prior assumptions that lends energy to his critique. In many ways, Venuti is correct. Yet his derision towards publications considering the 'untranslatable' overlooks the attention it has brought to the field. This may be indirect, its theoretical positions may indeed be problematic, but that it has brought more attention to translation is undeniable. Venuti concedes that

> any project that generates a conversation about translation might be welcomed in Anglophone cultures […] Yet if Cassin's dictionary were to become the main source of the talking points, the marginal status of translation would persist, unaffected, and may actually worsen.[40]

He rejects the perceived devaluation of his field, firmly believing this devaluation lies inherent in the very word "untranslatability" – but how can this be remedied? If Apter is indeed 'interested in theory, not translation,'[41] then how can we ourselves set forth a way of working that reconciles both projects productively? Is it possible to pursue Apter and Cassin's central idea while heeding Venuti's critiques? From my own perspective, the fact of the matter is that the 'untranslatable' only reinforces Venuti's claim for the translator's visibility: for it is when faced with foreign idioms that the creative abilities of the translator are best tested.[42]

To 'worsen'[43] the status of translation is in no scholar's interest. We must therefore think of ways in which a new, more globalised approach to theory can be practically implemented, in ways that are more resourceful of translation, as an exercise, a discipline,

and as a resource. One can detect, among the critiques above, the idea that 'untranslatability' is a concept better developed in academic institutions than by translators engaged in their practical profession.[44] I firmly reject this distinction. By establishing such a binary, critics like Venuti overlook the possibility that the 'untranslatable,' as concept, holds the chance to pedagogically render the teaching of literary studies and translation more institutionally dynamic, mutually beneficial and globally orientated. Yet if one is to walk the tightrope between Apter's ideas and Venuti's forewarnings, we must find a way to critically approach the 'untranslatable' as Apter insists, while also being mindful of what Venuti calls 'the contingencies of translation'[45] at the same time.

Theory redefined

The answer, I suggest, involves asking whether 'untranslatable' words can be interposed onto literary texts in other languages. What if our task is not just about translating a foreign word into another language, but translating a foreign *concept* into another context, as a theory of its own? When applying an 'untranslatable' to foreign texts, what cultural resonance occurs, what new insights are provided, and can such a foreignizing methodology rejuvenate (if not replace) theoretical literary readings? Is so, does this mean a new 'way of doing theory', as Apter suggests? Why would a 'new way' be necessary to begin with?

This is a question of broad dimensions. However, given that courses and seminars on theory are taught in almost every literature department worldwide, it is a question that deserves an equally global response. Literary theory is often historicised as an area of research that lasted from Russian Formalism to the death of Jacques Derrida, though its institutional conscription in literary syllabi has not dwindled since. Having taught both literary and translation theory at University College London, I can confirm how the lack of new developments within this field lead many students to wonder why these methodologies are still relevant. On the strength of Tihanov's argument, the following work addresses this issue with a more international, and more contemporary, answer. That is because it is one that seeks to identify the 'regime of relevance' that literature now occupies: one that is undeniably global, and, hence, indivisibly premised on translation. Coinciding with this reality, the form of literary theory this article proposes is one that lets foreign terms do the conceptual work that has usually been done by theory – foreign terms that Apter, Cassin and their contributors deem 'untranslatable.'

If contemporary literature today necessarily inhabits a global 'regime of relevance,' whereby authors new and old publish their original work with its future translators and translations in mind,[46] then this would imply that literary theory should itself make requisite changes. If World Literature has in fact proved overly 'Anglo-Saxon' in its orientation, or sanitised in what it produces, then surely it is up to formative syllabi to alter this in ways that are positive in the longer term. Can terms assumed to be 'untranslatable' in one language, act as theories when reading texts from another? Could 'untranslatable' words in each of these languages lend fresh inquiry onto the texts of another: to awaken and articulate theoretical claims, textual properties and (con)textual parallels not otherwise visible in previous scholarship? Were this methodology – of using 'untranslatable' terms to intervene in texts from other cultures – exerted pedagogically in the University, my hypothesis would be as follows.

Comparative Literature

A student of Comparative Literature is invariably engaged in learning the language, culture or writings of at least two other cultures. A student of languages may well be studying two or more in tandem (as is the prerequisite at some Universities), may be

studying one (which differs from their first language) or may simply study another language as an optional, online, additional or extra-curricular course. None of these scenarios prevent the following methodology being implemented.

In any of these cases, what I propose is that students can choose a pedagogical route whereby they are encouraged to locate a word from one of their languages that is deemed 'difficult' to translate (if not outright 'untranslatable'). They may want to choose a word from Apter and Cassin's Dictionary (not to mention the African, Arabic, Chinese and Russian editions currently forthcoming), or something they have come across elsewhere. Students could be expected to provide a summary of that word, taking stock of its genealogy, its history, its usages, its context. Students could also be asked to find essays by philologists, philosophers, authors, linguists, theorists or translators that refer to, retranslate or exposit this word specifically. The pedagogical challenge would be to encourage these students to gather as much as they can from this term, before applying it to a work from another culture. This second culture could be the other language they are studying, or it could simply be a text from their own culture.

What results from this would, as I see it, effectively fulfil the criteria by which coursework in literary theory is constituted. It requires that the student grasps an idea or concept before applying it to a case study, justifying its relevance, overlap and interference in the process. It involves the cross-cultural diversity that Comparative Literature champions, while also requiring the ability to define, apply, justify and conclude one's argument in their imposition of a theory towards a text. This will entail students exploring each word via its etymology, its cultural history and varying usage in literary, philosophical, linguistic, political and social contexts, before investing it with the necessary theoretical dimensions needed to see whether it can work as a theory for reading a foreign text.

This would demand, on the part of the student, the ability to work independently in one's area of focus (whether that be one language or a combination of several), embedding themselves fully within the etymological trajectory of that term as well as the contexts it has come to accommodate, before applying this word as a conceptual vehicle in their reading of another text. The gesture of doing so is inherently, and inescapably, comparative. On the part of the educator, this allows the '*Dictionary of Untranslatables*', contrary to Crane's judgement, to in fact prove itself a useful guidebook for teaching theory. The teacher may choose to allocate words from the Dictionary to their students at random, or encourage the students to find them independently, depending on the level that one is teaching.

Let's imagine, for instance, a student of French and Spanish (the most popular combination in both the U.S. and the U.K.). The student could find a term like *l'ésprit d'escalier* in French. In the first part of their work, they would be forced to explain, whether via presentation or coursework, how the contexts of the word have altered over time, tracing its etymology from its first appearances to its contemporary definition, using textual examples that show the journey of those shifts. The second part of their work would require them to find resembling terms in Spanish. What are its equivalents? If there aren't any, then what words in Spanish carry a similar connotation, or require knowledge of a similar set of social conventions? Can the student find works in Spanish literature or episodes of Spanish history which can be reframed through this term? For example, does the idea of going up stairs and regretting not having said something help us understand the dilemmas, ideas and characters of the Spanish Empire, Pedro Almodovar's films or Isabel Allende's novels?

Altogether, such a pedagogical route would provide not only a revitalised alternative to literary theory as it is often taught (and continues to be), but a means whereby the same standards of intellectual effort are made but with more creative responsibility and with a more cosmopolitan and comparative emphasis. It demands that students become theorists

themselves, and in the process realise how essential translation is to accomplish this. Judging on the decision of the educators involved, they may wish the students to play to their strengths, picking words from the languages they are familiar with, or to choose words with which they have little familiarity. By emphasising the translational aspect of these terms, it would allow students (and future teachers) of Comparative Literature to 'apply their energy and expertise to learning how to read translations as texts in their own right,'[47] successfully reinventing the teaching of literary theory while broadening the student's appreciation for translation in a global context.

Translation Studies

For students of translation, thinking about how philosophy and theory map onto each other leads students to realise the agency of translation, and its role as 'the core of the humanities,' as Venuti puts it.[48] Picking terms from Apter and Cassin's Dictionary, students are then able to study the variety of strategies by which these words have been translated over time. Managed successfully, this offers them a comprehensive way to trace the genealogy of ideas, and to realise the hermeneutic pathways by which such words have contributed to present debates. The students may choose to follow the word's semantic and conceptual migrations into another language, or several, or even its appearance (or untranslated omission) in one single text. In 'What Is a "Relevant" Translation?', an essay translated by Venuti, Jacques Derrida reflects how

> In 1967, to translate a crucial German word with a double meaning (*Aufheben*, *Aufhebung*), a word that signifies at once to suppress and to elevate, a word that Hegel says represents the speculative risk of the German language, and that the entire world had until then agreed was untranslatable – or, if you prefer, a word for which no one had agreed with anyone on a stable, satisfying translation into any language – for this word, I had proposed the noun *relève* and the verb *relever*. This allowed me to retain, joining them in a single word, the double motif of the elevation and the replacement that preserves what it denies or destroys, preserving what it causes to disappear.[49]

This text provides a novel insight into how philosophers are sometimes forced to confront foreign terms and to turn to the strategies by which a translator operates (even if a philosopher's explicit thoughts on translation are not usually so easy to find, the translator's introduction or preface to philosophical or theoretical works can just as easily suffice). When looking at the terms in Apter's edition of the Dictionary, there are no shortage of terms that could benefit from a historical study of their movement through time, space and discourse. I would suggest that exercises like this encourage students to not think of translation as an instantaneous, moment-by-moment commission or job but as a broad and complex history on which much of our knowledge of one another depends; and, as such, one that deserves a dramatic and substantial revaluation.

If Tihanov is correct that 'our understanding of literary theory has been greatly skewed and impoverished by our reluctance to historicise it,'[50] then students and teachers of translation should not shy from their considerable ability to contribute to this end. If Crane's belief that continental philosophy 'is on the decline worldwide,'[51] then exerting these kinds of pedagogical activities transcends the Dictionary from being what he terms a 'lament'[52] into being what Walter Benjamin famously termed translation itself, an *überleben*, or an afterlife, to which translation students are welcome to subscribe to.[53]

A crucial point is this. In neither of these cases, whether modelled for students of Comparative Literature or Translation Studies, does this pedagogical activity necessitate the conviction that these words are, in the literal or practical sense, 'untranslatable': that word, in itself, becomes a challenge for students to overcome. In the former case, 'untranslatable' words are transcended onto the literature of other cultures entirely, demonstrating

their flexibility and applicability in other contextual horizons; in the latter case, the examples of the word's translations serve to reinforce the difficulty (but, ultimately, success) of translating these terms. Finding words that 'the entire world' agrees are untrans-latable, or 'a word for which no one had agreed with anyone on a stable, satisfying translation into any language,'[54] is surprisingly easy. Moreover, were these courses taught in unison or collaboration, the mutual benefit to either discipline or Department would be far more visible. When entertaining such possibilities, it is difficult to see how such enterprises could indeed 'worsen'[55] the status of translation.

It is a proposition that appeals to the concerns of students and educators alike. I have heard many academics bemoan the tired formulas by which students are taught a theory, then to apply it to whatever text they choose. As Martin Ruehl once said during a lecture, 'if we have a theory in mind, of course we will find what we are looking for in the text in front of us. How does this improve our reading of it?'[56] The results can often seem shallow, inconclusive or unconvincing. Again and again, names like Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler appear in theory syllabi, though the scope of their relevance is geographically constrained and their relevance at times in question. Students, equally, feel their ability to grasp a theory and apply it does not always demonstrate a great deal, nor necessarily contribute to a conversation that is still alive and ongoing.

If our Departments can indeed reinstate the 'regime of relevance' to which they belong, making good on the global promise with which Universities advertise themselves can be carried out in new, challenging and counter-intuitive directions. Theory need no longer be the designation of a handful of European countries but can instead become a space for words from all over the world to be rigorously conceptualised and then translated, or transcended, into other contexts. Theory, explored and exercised in this way, becomes *praxis* for students on several levels. The educators can help students become researchers in their own right, generating theories from a far wider resource than many single-language syllabi provide, ultimately making theory less a space for repetition and more a space of conversation where concepts can be introduced and global referentiality extended, debated and encouraged.

To those who complain that this potentially threatens the sanctity of theory as it has hereby been taught, I would respond that actually it differs from the norm surprisingly little. In reality, terms like '*mimesis*,' '*jouissance*' and '*unheimliche*' have been introduced by various literary theorists and imbued with a significance and agency that extends far beyond their formal definitions, before being applied to various literary texts. Analytic philosophy prides itself on beginning with the stating of definitions, before then developing its arguments. Literary theory, when done well, requires a similar formula.

This is a task for which Comparative Literature and Translation Studies are especially and singularly equipped. I personally believe it is no longer enough to conclude, as Harrison does, by demanding more language classes, more language teachers, and more language learning.[57] That is effectively a tautological request, one that in any case overlooks the concrete budgetary issues of institutions. Untranslatability should be grasped not as an injunction against translation; but rather, as a topic that offers the chance to be more creative, dynamic and innovative in *how* we teach languages, and how we ourselves learn them.

Epilogue

If students are faced with foreign terms without simple equivalents, they are forced to understand that word better. The only way to do so, as any practical translator will attest, is via context. By being mindful of not just the target-text but also the source-*concept*, strategies of untranslatability could well benefit both literary and translational theory in

ways that critics like Venuti appear too polemical to acknowledge. If Tihanov is right that 'our understanding of literary theory has been greatly skewed and impoverished by our reluctance to historicise it,' (5) then there is every chance that this combination of theory and translation reinstate that priority for a new era of discourse.

I believe it would be a disservice both to translators at work as to students and professors in their seminars for their activities to remain mutually discrete: it is their ongoing engagement that members of either profession should aim for, and the 'untranslatable,' counterintuitively, is one path among others. Venuti complains that Apter is interested in theory, not translation – but this does not, as I have set forth – mean that her work cannot lead others to do both.

Epistemically, one can trace the source of Apter and Cassin's project to Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida. In the case of the former, Heidegger is mentioned in the Dictionary no less than 155 times, while Derrida (18 times in the Dictionary; 26 times in *Against World Literature*) forms a central part of Apter's text, as Damrosch points out.[58] Considering their appearance in radically historical terms, as Tihanov recommends, one notes that between 1974 and 1976 Barbara Cassin worked part-time at the Étienne-Marcel hospital in Paris, where she assisted Francoise Dolto with the care of traumatised children. This early encounter with an uninterpretable language was significance to her later project. She later attended the Lycée Condorcet, where she was taught by Jean Beaufret, a friend of Heidegger. She would come to be appointed the Director of the Collège international de philosophie, co-established by Derrida in Paris in 1983.

But what makes Derrida and Heidegger's work relevant to untranslatability beyond these simple facts? If one rereads their work, one finds continually a form of argumentation that differs from the Anglo-analytic norm: namely, of stating definitions, proving and confirming arguments, and justifying one's case. Rather, language plays a foregrounded role that rewards meta-analysis. Justification appears to stem from definition. They will take a word, unbound it from its supposed meaning, trace its etymology, and use this process to finalise their claims. Heidegger would do this incessantly, morphing the German language into what Steiner called a 'violent ordinariness' to conduct his arguments.[59] 'But can Heidegger reasonably support his phenomenology with etymology?' Ballard enquires rightly:

> This is an important point inasmuch as it is common for Heidegger to appeal to historical etymology to establish his own, seemingly stipulative, definitions. He does this largely due to his judgement that the force of words tends to degenerate in the course of time and that ontological hermeneutics ought first, if not mostly, to retrieve original meanings.[60]

It is this vein of Continental thought that could be a potential template for what I am proposing. To salvage language and 'retrieve original meanings' via etymological strategies is not a bad way to conduct one's scholarly arguments; what is crucial, however, is that it is a process more informed by translational realities and contingencies, historical contexts and solid argumentation.

From my own perspective, while I do not believe that any word is truly 'untranslatable' in the practical sense (hence my decision to put this term in quotation marks here and throughout), this does not render the present suggestions redundant. Venuti is right: we need to correct the assumption that words "lose something significant" in the hands of the translator; my suggestion is that we should wonder what words can, instead, *gain* in the hands of the translator, theorist, the literary critic and the student of language. To transcend the 'untranslatable' word onto a corresponding foreign context, shows students of Comparative Literature and Translation Studies the fallacy that such a thing as an 'untranslatable' word exists to begin with. The efforts to conduct this imposition could lead them to reflect on the effort of translators at work, and the ways in which translators make leaps back and forth between cultures, histories, languages and lives.

From a political perspective, the very *claim* of untranslatability is, in and of itself, a fascinating one. Given more attention, it could well entice students into studying cultures and languages to begin with. Amidst a surge in nationalist sentiment around the world, surely a question worth asking educators and students is: Why does nationalism profit from idiomaticity? The late George Steiner contentiously argues that the separation of languages is borne from a human desire for privacy and differentiation.[61] When asking why certain words nominate a certain sense of cultural essentialism, Kyra Giorgi finds that such words tend to provoke a mixture of 'nostalgia, melancholy and fatalism', evincing 'the production of memory and the politics of hope.'[62] Simply put, we cannot understand power *or* politics without understanding language. With an eye to the 'regime of relevance' we currently occupy, given the recent rise of ethno-nationalisms worldwide, studying where, when and how claims of untranslatability are established may be more important for humanists now more than ever. Students must grasp the enormity of contextual baggage with which words circulate if they are to use them successfully in a globalised discourse. As I see it, such students will come out of this process with a better understanding of where words come from, how they are shaped, *how they shape them* and why, encouraging a better grasp on political discourse and vocabulary. Cassin's project could well become the touchstone for a still more ambitious project: encouraging Europeans to develop their own political vocabulary, one that is not recycled from American society and discourse.

If Tihanov is correct, then the question underpinning World Literature – whether we should think literature 'within or beyond the horizon of language'[63] – is one that makes its attempts to interact, correlate and flourish vis-à-vis Translation Studies not so much desirable as necessary, for the survival, renewal and cross-integration of both disciplines. As Apter puts it,

> Both translation studies and World Literature extended the promise of worldly criticism, politicised cosmopolitanism, comparability aesthetics galvanized by a deprovincialized Europe, an academically redistributed area studies and a redrawn map of language geopolitics. Partnered, they could deliver still more: translation theory as *Weltliteratur* would challenge flaccid globalisms that paid lip service to alterity while doing little more than to buttress neoliberal "big tent" syllabi taught in English.[64]

However, reservations must be acknowledged too. When surveying the contents of Apter's Dictionary, Venuti believes that much of its error lies in a nagging presentism. In other words, it risks the possibility of imposing contemporary ideas on thinkers of the past, for the sake of furthering one's argument and appropriating it to fit in with a preconditioned standpoint. Venuti claims this approach tends to 'turn the past into a mirror of' contemporary academic trends: 'This form of cultural narcissism we can do without.'[65] I agree that it would be essential for those who followed the suggestions above to avoid this possibility. Yet, I would also point out, that this is a challenge further complicated by the fact that the Dictionary takes much of its entries specifically from contemporary thinkers in the first place. Earlier in this article I mentioned Tihanov's belief that theory has much to gain from being studied with more 'radical historicity.'[66] What could meet this demand better than the etymological study of a term, coupled with the hermeneutic ability to trace its semantic and cultural journey to its present definition? It is, after all, precisely the lack of historical rigour that has afforded Apter and Cassin so much critique. Making this an imperative avoids this issue henceforth.

The methodology argued for here does not require the 'fetishizing'[67] of untranslatability that Venuti and other practitioners dismiss, nor need it ignore the issues of Apter and Cassin's work. To be clear, I am not advancing an argument for the fetishization of language; what untranslatability offers is the chance to understand why words are fetishized, *when* and *by whom*. The late Harold Bloom once famously referred to the proponents of

literary theory as 'The School of Resentment,' criticising their emphasis on identity politics at the expense of what he saw as legitimate literary analysis.[68] Yet if we made attempts to develop the limits of what theory can *be* – into a model conditioned by a greater rigour of etymological and translational analysis and involving a broader circle of languages – then it is more difficult to be dissuaded from such a training. If students can present their understanding of a word in its historical and philosophical totality, then this could create a form of theory far harder to dismiss. I have suggested that it encourages a globalised framework for criticism as well as translation, one that can be built continually, whereby the mutual benefit (and dependency) of these disciplines as well as the mutual benefit of Apter and Venuti's ideas are made visible to all who wish to see them.

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Notes

[1] Galin Tihanov, The Birth and Death of Literary Theory (Paolo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2019), p. 20.

[2] Tihanov, p. 30.

[3] Tihanov, p. 5.

[4] Roman Jackobson, Krystyna Pomorska & Stephen Rudy, "On Realism in Art" in: *Language in Literature* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1987), p. 19.

[5] Tihanov, p. 4.

[6] Tihanov, p. 174.

[7] Tihanov, p. 182.

[8] Tihanov, p. 182.

[9] Nicholas Harrison has already made suggestions in this direction, claiming that while Damrosch seems to emphasise the global and foreign forms of reception that literature can endure (and that helps it survive), 'it is difficult to see how this could be caused by anything other than translation.' See: Nicholas Harrison, 'World literature: what gets lost in translation?' *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 49.3 (2014): pp. 411–26.

[10] Ed: D. M. Spitzer, Philosophy's Treason (Wilmington: Vernon Press, 2020), p. 120.

[11] Large claims the German Romantics were keen on 'philosophising translation in a minor key,' convinced that "translation proper" 'lies ever elsewhere and does not correspond to the kind of translation one might actually be doing at any one time,' but, also - somewhat confusingly - that 'such "translation proper" might actually be constituted by untranslatability.' See: Large et al, p. 55.

[12] Cassin, *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: Dictionnaire des intraduisibles* (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

[13] Large et al, *Untranslatability: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (London: Routledge 2018), p. 15. Co-edited by Duncan Large, Moroko Akashi, Wanda Józwickowska and Emily Rose, this volume is a collation of conferences at both Nottingham University and the University of East Anglia. It is the first volume of its kind to address the topic of untranslatability from various disciplinary perspectives, and acts, in many ways, as a series of responses to Apter and Cassin's projects. My review of this book for Oxford Comparative Criticism and Translation is available online via: https://www.academia.edu/39390440/Ed._Duncan_Large_et_al_-_Untranslatability_ Inter-disciplinary_Perspectives; https://www.occt.ox.ac.uk/cct-review/untranslatability-inter-disciplinary-perspectives-edited-duncan-large-et-al.

[14] As Duncan Large, drawing on his experience of translating Friedrich Nietzsche's complete works, assesses the term in the practical context when the phrase "I can't translate this" becomes "This is untranslatable": 'In other words, they extrapolate from a perception of their own individual failure to a structural impossibility. Untranslatability in this sense simply functions as an excuse: it can be invoked by the individual translator from time to time; but it is tantamount to a concession of defeat, and hardly something to be celebrated.' (See: *Untranslatability*, p. 51)

[15] *Against World Literature*, p. 3–4.

[16] Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003). Damrosch writes: 'My claim is that world literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike… A work enters into world literature by a double process: first, by being read *as* literature, second, by circulating out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin.' pp. 5–6.

[17] *Against World Literature*, p.3.

[18] *Against World Literature*, p. 18.

[19] *Against World Literature*, p. 247.

[20] Ginzburg, 'Ethnophilology: Two Case Studies,' Global Intellectual History 2:1 (2017) pp. 3–17, p. 3.

[21] Ginzburg, pp. 3–4.

[22] Crane, Review: Dictionary of Untranslatables,' The Times Literary Supplement (January 28th, 2015).

[23] Crane, Review: Dictionary of Untranslatables,' The Times Literary Supplement (January 28th, 2015).

[24] Damrosch, 'Review: Against World Literature,' Comparative Literature Studies 51:3 (2014), pp. 504–8.

[25] 'Review: Against World Literature,' p. 506

[26] 'Review: Against World Literature,' p. 508.

[27] Large et al, pp. 38–39.

[28] Large et al, p. 138.

[29] Apter, p. 247.

[30] 'Apter was by no means the first critic to question cultural substitutability via translation… We could say that in translation studies Venuti (in turn most likely influenced by Bakhtin) espoused "a politics of untranslatability" in seeking ways to act against homogenising tendencies in English-language literary translation contexts. Apter does not acknowledge Venuti's influence, but when she highlights the geopolitical implications of assuming that one text or culture can automatically 'stand for' another text or culture his work inevitably informs the critical background to her endeavour to rewrite comparatism.' See: Large et al, p. 138.

[31] Venuti, *Contra Instrumentalism* (Nebraska: Nebraska University Press, 2019), p. 37.

[32] *Contra Instrumentalism*, p. 68.

[33] *Contra Instrumentalism*, p. 56.

[34] *Contra Instrumentalism*, p. 65.

[35] *Contra Instrumentalism*, p. 65.

[36] *Contra Instrumentalism*, p. 67.

[37] *Contra Instrumentalism*, p. 71.

[38] *Contra Instrumentalism*, p. 73. If any passage in particular confirms Venuti's reading, it is when Apter writes: 'If there is a philosophy of untranslatability in Badiou, it has little to do with language. It derives from an incommensurability at the heart of mathematical Platonism.' See: Apter, *Against World Literature*, p. 12. See Damrosch's more extensive discussion of Apter's theoretical limitations in footnote 56.

[39] *Contra Instrumentalism*, p.37.

[40] *Contra Instrumentalism*, p. 62.

[41] *Contra Instrumentalism*, p. 71.

[42] I have covered this debate in more detail in Byron Taylor, "Untranslatable Testimony: Paul Celan in Back-Translation," Translation and Literature, Vol. 29, 2020, pp. 411-426.

[43] *Contra Instrumentalism*, p. 62.

44 Klaus Mundt, in particular, claims that 'untranslatability is a concept that seems to work best in an artificial, theoretical environment with deliberately narrow definitions of translation… untranslatability as the impossibility of translation is a relatively recent invention, and possibly one motivated by politics.' See: Duncan et al, p.65.

45 *Contra Instrumentalism*, p. 67.

46 See: Rebecca Walkowitz. *Born Translated* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015). Walkowitz identifies how a series of contemporary authors, from J. M. Coetzee to Mohsin Hamid, realised that their books would be published in multiple languages at once, constraining their ability to add too much cultural specificity or local detail. This culminates, writes Walkowitz, in an 'unidiomatic writing that seems […] like no language in particular.' (175) As she understands it, 'translation is not secondary or incidental' to these works but is rather 'a condition of their production.' (4) therefore they are effectively born as works of World Literature.

47 *Contra Instrumentalism*, p. 46.

48 *Contra Instrumentalism*, p. 40.

49 Jacques Derrida & Lawrence Venuti, "What is a "Relevant" Translation?" *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 27, No. 2 (Winter, 2001), pp. 174–200. p. 196.

50 Tihanov, p. 5.

51 Crane, Review: Dictionary of Untranslatables,' The Times Literary Supplement (January 28th, 2015).

52 Crane, Review: Dictionary of Untranslatables,' The Times Literary Supplement (January 28th, 2015).

53 Lawrence Venuti & Mona Baker, *The Translation Studies Reader* (London & New York: Routledge Books, 2000), p. 17.

54 Jacques Derrida & Lawrence Venuti, p. 196.

55 *Contra Instrumentalism*, p. 62.

56 This lecture was delivered as part of the compulsory course on Literary Theory, as part of the MPhil European, Latin American and Comparative Literatures and Cultures, University of Cambridge, late 2016.

57 Nicholas Harrison, 'World literature: what gets lost in translation?' *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 49.3 (2014): pp. 411–26.

58 Damrosch writes how Apter views Continental Philosophy itself through a selective lens. Symptomatic is a page-long listing of influential translations of Continental works… Her examples of these pivotal translations are: Derrida's French translation of Husserl, followed by English-language translations of Derrida, of Lacan, and of Derrida again; then of Foucault, of Derrida again, of Kristeva, of Irigaray, and of Derrida yet again – twice – and then of Deleuze, Agamben, Rancière, Malabou, Badiou, Lacan, and again Badiou, ending with Judith Butler in French. Neither here nor anywhere in the book do we find Lukács, or Bakhtin, or Gadamer, or Gramsci, no Ricouer, no Althusser. In place of any of these figures, we have Derrida six times.' (508).

59 George Steiner, Heidegger (London & New York: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 84.

60 Bruce Ballard, *The Role of Mood in Heidegger's Ontology* (USA: University Press of America, 1991), p. 15.

61 Steiner, *After Babel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

62 Giorgi, *Emotions, Language and Identity on the Margins of Europe* (London: Palgrave Books, 2014), p.8.

63 Tihanov, p. 182.

64 Apter, pp. 7–8.

65 *Contra Instrumentalism*, p. 59.

66 Tihanov, p. 5.

67 *Contra Instrumentalism*, p. 71.

68 See: Harold Bloom, The Western Canon (London & New York: MacMillian Press, 1995).

How is Translation Possible?: The Secret of Maurice Blanchot

ALEX OBRIGEWITSCH

To keep the secret, it is evidently saying as non-secret, inasmuch as it is not sayable.[1]

Translation, whether inter- or intra-linguistic, ever bears the weight of an excess, a silence or absence, of the untranslatable. Language, and we with it, bear witness to this unspeakable excess which bears no witnesses with the expression of every word. But what is this excess of untranslatability which marks language as its "silent secret"?[2] What might be said, through the saying of language[3] (carried over and carried out in language translated beyond itself), of this witnessing without witness, this unspeakable testimony?

What shall be undertaken in what follows is a reading, a translation perhaps (though certainly neither final, total, nor complete), of a fragmentary narrative or *récit* by Maurice Blanchot entitled "(A Primal Scene?)."[4] By reading this short passage in relation to some of the scattered remarks Blanchot makes upon what he calls "the disaster," remaining vigilant towards its relation to silence and to secrecy, we shall attempt to testify to the infinitely unsaid, the impossible silence, the secret which expresses the untranslatable in keeping it withheld. For every work of translation, translation *itself*, not only testifies to this secret untranslatable (in the silence of its attestation, the silent disavowal marking its avowal in its fault), but ever remains, necessarily (however paradoxically, excessively, impossibly), bound to this refusal of translation, its impossibility, which conditions the possibility of translation as its impossible (absence of) origin. Translation bears the mark of its impossibility, its fault, in every word, as the unsaid secret which is testified to in the absence of testimony, in the silent faltering by which translation fails to say what *must* fail to be said – the untranslatable, the impossible, from which the inscription of every translation (and is what is said in every word of every language not a translation, carrying over from silence into speech?) takes its mark; from the beginning already suffering the wound of the disaster; having forgotten "itself" in constituting itself in what is said of its saying, as translation. Translation bears its secret, hidden in the open – might we not open what is hidden, translate without translating the exigency of the untranslatable? This is the task to which we essay, remaining watchful in following the demand of another fragment from a different work by Blanchot: "Express only that which cannot be expressed. Leave it unexpressed."[5]

Let us first read the *récit*, the testimony of an untestifiable (non-)experience of the absence of origin which marks language and translation, conveyable only through the medium of fiction or literature.[6]

¨ (A primal scene?) *You who live later, close to a heart that beats no more, suppose, suppose this: the child – is he seven years old, or eight perhaps? – standing by the window, drawing the curtain and, through the pane, gazing. What he sees: the garden, the wintry trees, the wall of a house. Though he sees, no doubt in the manner of a child, his play space, he grows weary and slowly looks up toward the ordinary sky, with clouds, grey light, the day dull and without distance.*

What happens then: the sky, the same *sky, suddenly open, absolutely black and absolutely empty, revealing (as by the broken pane) such an absence that all has since always and forevermore been lost*

therein, to the point that there is affirmed and dissipated the vertiginous knowledge that nothing is what there is, and first of all nothing beyond. The unexpected of this scene (its interminable trait) is the feeling of happiness that immediately submerges the child, the ravaging joy to which he can only testify by tears, an endless streaming of tears. He is thought to suffer a childish sorrow; attempts are made to console him. He said nothing. He will live henceforth in the secret. He will cry no more.[7]

It is all there: the rupture, the refusal, the disaster, the silence, and the secret. All, that is, except, perhaps, translation. Though it is not explicitly presented, translation remains essential to the presentation (of the unpresentable)[8] which this *récit* figures through the figure of the *infans*, the "unfigurable figure"[9] which appears in its death, its non-appearance ("it cannot appear"[10]) as the unspeaking *in-fans*. This all remains to be explained and explicated, in an unfolding of the secret which is borne unsaid, testified without word, in the saying of this cryptic *récit*.

As Leslie Hill notes, though Blanchot never published any translations, in the course of his writing he would often engage in translation himself, and the question of translation (in both the restricted and general sense) ever remained close to the heart of his thinking.[11] For translation, as an operation, explicitly enacts the movement of writing and language itself: the carrying over of the unsaid into the said by opening the possibility of saying. Denis Hollier remarks, in light of this, that every written text, the target of the work of translation to be translated, "is already itself something like a foreign language,"[12] prior to its encounter with another language. Literature, the work of writing, is always already a translation – an attempt at carrying over from silence and into words what it is possible to say. Every work of writing (Blanchot, in his later works, will move away from the term 'literature' (*la littérature*), towards the use of the term 'writing' (*l'écriture*) is thus always already, "according to the expression Maurice Blanchot borrows from Joë Bousquet, translated from silence."[13]

It is in this sense that Hollier will claim that "literature is pure translation."[14] Its "purity" is derived from the fact that it has *nothing* to translate (in the most simple, yet rigorous, sense of this phrase). What it seeks to say is not something said elsewhere, in another language, but to translate what, for any language, for language itself, *is* nothing. It is thus that literature touches upon the heart of translation, translation in its purest form – for it (re)enacts, calls forth, the originary instance of translation to repeat itself. But herein does literature bear its ineluctable and necessary fault, marking the *faux pas* of its transgression which it cannot take as a step (its *pas au-delà*). For translation's originary instance is no event, occurring in no instant as origin or *arche*; faced with its absence of origin, this absence at its origin (having *nothing* to translate), translation betrays its own impossibility (to play upon the well-known relation between *traduire* and *trahir*). Literature may thus stage, set the scene, of the betrayal of translation, by setting it into the scene of a *récit*. And this is precisely what Blanchot does with "(A Primal Scene?)," through the passage of a *mise en abyme*, saying the unsayable while leaving it unsaid, figuring (re-presenting) the secret of translation by translating it in secret. The secret is betrayed in withholding it, and thus keeping it, just as the betrayal of translation evinces the silent secret at its heart, its perpetual exposure of and to its impossibility – the untranslatable.

But we must stop for a moment to reflect upon this complex phrase, "the betrayal of translation." It bears within itself, carrying over to us – translating – a plurality of senses. First, we note that 'betrayal' can signify either a traitorous or disloyal action in relation to a person or thing, as well as the giving over or revelation of something hidden or withheld (most often unintentionally). In addition, the 'of' in this phrase might be read in both the subjective and the objective genitive. For these reasons, the *betrayal of translation* bears a fourfold signification: translation as disloyalty to the untranslatable in the attempt to translate it; the disclosure of the (mis)translation, the interpretive re-figuration, the fault of translation

which marks the default of the untranslatable in its absence, its untranslatability; the presentation, in translation, that the work of translation is, as a rendering possible; and the fault or betrayal of its origins which translation bears in its very expression, marking its own failure or weakness. The betrayal of translation is thus not a contingent or circumstantial chance occurring in the work of translation; rather, it is traced in the very essence of translation itself, insofar as the "essence" of translation is the disappearance or effacement of its own essence. The essence of translation disappears into the untranslatable, the presence of absence, of impossibility, marking out the fault before the very beginning of the work of translation, its absence of origin. Translation betrays itself, essentially, as translation, transgressing itself before initiating itself, as thus interdicting "itself" (essentially) *as* translation. This, then, is the secret of translation – the disaster of translation. Translation, contested in its very constitution as translation by the agony (the *agon*) of the untranslatable, is always already disastrous in that it bears, from before its beginning, before being said, the fault (in default) of never being able to say what disappears, effaces itself, in the saying that every translation will have said. Its testimony is ineluctably marked by the faltering failure of testifying – for it bears witness to nothing (to what is a nothing less than nothing, less than nothing as no-thing, as the non-being opposed to being). The (absent) essence of translation, translation in the void of its purity (devoiding itself of any pure work of translation, any absolute or total product of translation), through the exemplary exposure of literature and writing, returns us to "(A Primal Scene?)" by way of its essential detouring. The work of translation, like this *récit*, is thus "placed *under the sign of the disaster*."[15] But what is this disaster of which we have been speaking, which binds the *récit* to translation in their mutual expressions, their unwinding – their silences and their secrets?

The disaster – an impossible thought. Perhaps the most complex and slippery of Blanchot's obscure words or "terms." We do not pretend to undertake a complete explanation here (an impossible endeavor); rather, we will note the elements of this impossible thought, this disaster of thought, that bear directly upon the secret of translation. As Lacoue-Labarthe explains, "'disaster' is not a *name*."[16] It does not refer to anything, to any event which could be said to occur in any present. If it names or translates anything, it would be the interruption, the disaster, of all attempts at translating into a name, of having said what no name can ever say. A radical nothing, neither named nor wholly unnamed (in the "neither… nor…" which marks the *neutre*, another improper name…[17]), it acts as a password, a response to grant access to this unknown outside of or foreign to all knowledge. 'The disaster' acts as a shibboleth, a word which lets pass by that which cannot be named, but passes silently beneath the ruins of the name – streaming, endlessly (like the child's "endless streaming of tears" from "(A Primal Scene?)"; 'shibboleth' itself being "translated" or carried over from the Hebrew word for a stream or torrent), in the turning-away, turning everything away from itself, returning it to the void, the nothing that "is what there is," which precedes all language and all thought, conditioning it while at once suspending it, in the silence of an infinite caesura.[18] Thus is the disaster unknown, as Blanchot says early on in *The Writing of the Disaster* – the unknown which is unknown to and by any name (including 'the unknown'); "it is the unknown name for that in thought itself which dissuades us from thinking it, distancing us by proximity."[19] Thought which turns away and turns us away from thought – a thought of refusal and a refusal of thought. And like translation, moving with this thought in its *faux pas*, its false step, what is carried over is not what was borne; what is said (*dit*) is not what was to say (*dire*). A distance, internal to the saying, to the movement of translation, is opened up by translation itself – the betrayal of translation is the disaster of translation, we might say. This distance, this gap or *écart*, which opens up in the movement of translation, *as* the (faltering) movement of translation, maintains, in the presence of an absence ("close to a heart which beats no

more"), a relation to what is excluded, dismissed, separated (all borne in the French *écarter*), to that which never is or was (in being) yet which haunts, remains, in the trace of withdrawing itself, diverging and deviating reflexively (*s'écarter*) from the very attempt to present or translate it. Might 'the disaster' be the shibboleth, the word of passage, marking the unknown name of the nameless which refuses every name, yet which remains, silently, behind every name, every word, as though one only needed (impossibly) the drawing of the curtain?[20] But, were this curtain to be drawn, what would present itself to us, what is drawn forth? Nothing – nothing that could be said, certainly. Nothing beyond, and yet the imperative, the exigency, to attempt to speak to it, to translate it. Translation, it's necessary failure and betrayal, reveals its secret while keeping it, letting it withdraw in the disastrous fragmentation which marks its work[21] – that "when all is said, what remains to say [*reste à dire*] is the disaster, ruin of words, failure by writing, rumor which murmurs; what remains without remaining [*reste sans reste*] (the fragmentary)."[22]

Translation bears this secret, openly, in silence. In this secret does it live, living on, living beyond (*survivant* and *sur-vivant*), living off of, this originary fault which it holds close (in its own internal distance) and withholds. There remains, in translation, *as* translation (translation being the mark of a passage and an impasse from before its very beginning), a remainder without remains, which never remains as present but only as the absence (*of* a saying, *of* every saying) which silence marks. "There remains," Blanchot writes, "the unnamed in the *name* of which we keep silent."[23] We keep silent, or, perhaps better, we remain vigilant, keep watch over, remain wakeful to (in the senses of *veiller* and *s'éveiller* which bear so much significance for the discretion of Blanchot, and the discretion that his thought and writing demands) the silence which we are demanded to keep (though never as "our own," as proper to us, or as a possession). But this silence is not kept or guarded (*garder*) by not speaking, by not translating. Paradoxically, what is demanded of us, in order to keep the secret, to keep the secret *secret*, is to say it by not saying it, to translate it by failing to translate it. For it is in the failure of what is said or translated that the fugitive "essence" of translation betrays itself – what is said in the faulty saying gives to the discreet and discrete reader, hearer, or respondent a reflexive presentation (*in absentia*) of the necessarily un-said. To keep the secret, as our epigraph attests, is to testify (via its silence, its "non-secret") to the unsayable, the unavowable, in bearing witness to it in the fault, the failure, of the very attempt to say it, to translate it into words or speech (*paroles*).[24]

Returning to "(A Primal Scene?)," we have touched on the relation of fiction or literature to translation, the work of "pure" translation, but it remains to connect the disaster to the "scene." Evidently there is a strong connection between this thought without thought, this name in the place of the unnamed, and "(A Primal Scene?)," for the latter appears (and reappears, in differing expressions and allusions) throughout the work devoted to the disaster and its writing, *The Writing of the Disaster*. We may find this connection, perhaps, in the secret attested to (though never avowed) in the *récit*. The secret of the disaster, perhaps, as well as the disaster of the secret – in the turning and turning away in which the child will henceforth live.

Where, in "(A Primal Scene?)," is the disaster? One must answer, paradoxically in relation to what we have just been noting: *nowhere*. Within the *récit*, the disaster does not appear, it is not shown – responding to the refusal of giving itself which the disaster would be, in that it "is not an event (the proper [*le propre*] of what happens [*arrive*]) – it does not arrive [*n'arrive pas*],"[25] but marks the passing (and perhaps the passing over) of a silence to which we referred before in relation to the secret, here denoted as "writing (or Saying [*Dire* – note the capitalization to which Blanchot refers in the quotation from note 24, above]) preceding every phenomena, all manifestation: all appearing."[26] The disaster does not appear *in* "(A Primal Scene?)," though it is perhaps figured, translated – faultily, necessarily

– in the turn (the volta or the caesura) of the paragraph break, around which the rupture of the sky, of the experience, of the *récit*, are all focused in a streaming out in the wake of this withdrawal from all attestation, leaving the child, abandoned, in its secret, awakened to watching over its silence, its inability to be expressed, translated to another, to be recalled or remembered. A primal scene, then – though the origin, the primal *arche* remains void and openly absent, and the scene fails to evoke the disaster which provokes and yet destitutes all translation and attestation. The disaster, coming "before" "(A Primal Scene?)," anterior to it (for it, in its confiding to us, confiding itself to language and the trust in language (*confiance dans le langage*),[27] in asking us to "suppose, suppose this,"[28] is already a testimony, a recollection, *après-coup*), remains outside its attestation – and yet, like the untrans-latable of translation, its essential absence, it marks the outside which ruptures the interiority of the narrative ("as by the broken pane"), which marks itself in the secret *of* the "scene" (the secret of which the scene speaks, and the secret which the scene withholds). It is, like the *infans* and the death of the *infans* which marks the entry into language, and which has been remarked as a potential frame for this *récit*,[29] conspicuous in its absence from the scene[30] (for, as spoken or written, as attested to, this "scene" occurs (to us, for us) through language, and thus necessitates this anterior death, this "impossible necessary death"[31] which is reflected, *en abyme*, in "(A Primal Scene?)" itself). The disaster, and its translation, do not appear *in* "(A Primal Scene?)" – they do, however, appear *through* the writing, and its attestation, as the silent secret of writing, of this Saying, of which the only remainder in what is said "in" the "scene" is but its silence (the absent, dead heart around which the paragraphs turn in their break, marking the caesura, denoting the silence, of what remains ever anterior to the work of writing; to what we might hazard to refer to as the writing of the disaster). The secret of the *récit*, like the secret of translation, is borne silently on its very face, in the absence of what the word or words present, as the absence which the word and all words fail to present.

A final word on the secret, and its relation to the untranslatable, before drawing to a close. What is left to us, this testimony "*testifying for the absence of attestation*,"[32] is what is left to us in the disaster and its secret marking "(A Primal Scene?)" as "language's 'secret'."[33] And what is this secret? What more can we say of it, translate of it, without betraying the unavowability which renders it necessarily secret?

As David Applebaum expresses it, "the secret is empty, contains nothing [to say], has nothing to tell, as if there were no secret. Therein lives the secret."[34] The secret (of the disaster, of "(A Primal Scene?)," of translation) is *nothing* – nothing that can be said, bound to the silence of the saying as its interminable un-said ("nothing is what there is, and nothing beyond"). Applebaum's suggestion that the secret is that there is no secret is an echo of the reading (the betrayal) that Lacoue-Labarthe made in composing his short, poetic response to "(A Primal Scene?)," entitled "Dismay" [*"L'émoi"*], written in 1976, and published (with various revisions) in 1978, 2000, and 2011.[35] This text, dedicated to Blanchot, bears the following phrase: "*there is no secret, but that remains unavowable.*"[36] The secret, he suggests, is that one cannot avow that there is no secret – one cannot say this nothing, this absence, attesting to it by translating its untranslatable remainder of silence. When, in 1980, Blanchot republished "(A Primal Scene?)" within the central pages of *The Writing of the Disaster*, he also included some reflections upon the *récit*, many pages later, in the form of a discussion between anonymous speakers. And it is here, in the words of this anonymous, neutral voice, this person who is no-one (*personne*), that Blanchot responds to Lacoue-Labarthe, writing that "*the secret which is alluded to is that there is none, except for those who refuse to avow.*"[37] Lacoue-Labarthe had noted that there is no secret, but that this could not be avowed or attested to. And Blanchot responds that yes, there is no secret – *except* for those that refuse to avow, to attest to the secret. For those who refuse to attest,

the secret remains, lives on, *survivant*, in and through them – just as they, like the child, live henceforth in it (in the silence of its secrecy, unavowed, neither wholly said nor not said).

Later still, near the close of the book, another anonymous dialogue is staged, upon the question of the secret. The interlocutors raise the phrase from "(A Primal Scene?)," "He will live henceforth in the secret," and one of the interlocutors responds that they best "*leave to silence this phrase which wants perhaps only* to say [*dire* – unitalicized in the text] *silence*."[38] To say silence – is this impossible task or demand, like the representation of the unrepresentable in "(A Primal Scene?)," not the very "essence" of translation which we attested to above? To say silence, which is akin to leaving it unsaid, but, as suggested before, not in saying nothing, but rather in saying everything which would be or would translate what would be the nothing of silence, of which silence *is not*, nothing of which bears the failure of silence in its failure to say it in what is said. Silence, saying the secret, remains unsaid. Refusing to avow, to testify to the secret, the secret is kept *as secret*, as unavowable in any and every testimony, but which allows it to speak of itself, in withdrawing or withholding "itself." It is in this attempt at saying silence that the child (no one, everyone, every one of us) must henceforth live, and, failing, die.

Is this interdiction, this demand for secrecy, an injunction against translation? Certainly not; rather, it demands of us that we testify to, keep watch over, this secret of translation, which can only be undertaken by means of the interminable (though hopeless, faulted, impossible) attempt at further translation (of the secret). Not that this un-said could ever be said. Rather, we must watch over and preserve the trace remainder of the silent element in every saying, of this alterity which escapes from every expression, through the wakeful discretion of the perpetual work of translation, of writing. This work (along with its attendant unworking) is infinite, without beginning or end. It marks our existence, finitude rupturing itself upon the infinite, the infinite ever breaking in upon the finite which gives it its infinitude. "Wakefulness [*La veille*],"[39] Blanchot writes, "is without beginning nor end. To wake [or 'to watch,' *Veiller*] is in the *neutre* [*au neutre*]."[40] To remain wakeful and watchful, in saying, in translating, not in the first person, as "I" ("*Je*") or ego (*moi*), but as the anonymous no one who speaks for or through everyone, every person (*personne*) – the neutral and neuter saying of language itself, "it" "itself," *le il*. "If I say:" Blanchot remarks still later, "the disaster keeps watch, it is not in order to give a subject to the vigil; it is to say: the watch does not pass under a sidereal sky."[41] Who watches, remaining wakeful? Who translates, and thus bears the burden of carrying over its weight, the greatest weight? No one, and yet us all, though never as "ourselves." The disaster makes sure of this, by displacing and ruining all assurance and certainty, in the nameless name of the secret.

Translation is thus a demand and the response to that demand, infinitely oscillating between the two in the faltering steps which re-sign and remain as the ashes marking the self-immolating passage of translation in its secret. Maurice Blanchot figures this translation at the heart of saying and its silence through the rupture and interruption of the figure (of the self, the subject, and the *récit* itself) in "(A Primal Scene?)." This text, as Christopher Fynsk acknowledges, "is also the awakening to a watch that will never be wakeful enough, that can never penetrate the night to which it opens."[42] He refers here to the closing lines of one of the anonymous dialogues upon the "scene" within *The Writing of the Disaster*, in which one of the interlocutors says the following: "*Consequently, waiting and watchful* [*attendant et veillant*], *since suddenly wakened* [*éveillé*] *and, knowing it henceforth, never wakeful* [or 'watchful,' *éveillé*] *enough*."[43] We may never be fully awake, fully watchful, lucid in seeing and knowing everything, being able to say, to have said, everything in the saying which could exhaust it and leave it without secret, with nothing left of its untranslatable *nothing* to remain. And thus we must continue to translate, in bearing witness to, watching over, the fault which marks our existence in relation to language. We must win ourselves

in the impossible game of translation and the untranslatable, wherein we always lose (ourselves). This is the disaster of translation, in the infinite translation of the disaster. This we must awaken to, so as to watch over – in the interminable attempt to translate the untranslatable, and thus leave it untranslated, to radiate in its disastrous absence.

Let us then, as we must, leave the space, the void, in translation, ever yet to be spoken, without a final word, as we turn to and return to silence. For we must bear witness to the ineluctable finitude of our existence exposed to infinity, the finitude of existence "itself" in the faceless face of the infinite translation *of* language. We, as no one, as everyone, live in the secret of this dying existence, translating between a life and a death equally impossible on either side of this untraversable field of neutrality that exists between, yet outside of, being and non-being. Let us keep the secret, in keeping to the secret. Said otherwise: let us translate, infinitely. For there ever remains, in excess, in all words and their silences, the mark of an impossible, necessary translation. Without remaining (in being), smoldering at the edges dividing the possible from the impossible. Cinders, the ashes of nothing (no ashes now remain, taken by the wind of infinite breath; and yet they remain, without remaining, in the circulation of words), remain as a testament to this demand of translation upon us all, bearing the secret, silently, upon every breath, of a memory in excess of all memory, of a forgetting which we cannot know, remember, any more than we can forget. Of a primal scene (a primal scene?) which never was, was never principle, primary, or original, and never appeared in or as a scene to be (re)presented. All remains, as ever, to be said – still suspended, in question, as upon the vacillation of a breath. In and out, repeating the silence which it bears, unbearably, in the refusal of the translation attendant to the betrayal of translation which marks the "essence" of all translation. Burning, burning itself out, burning up the words which would bear it forth. All that remains in the work of translation – silence, and ashes. "*Silence des cendres épandues sur une plaine.*" "Silence of ashes spread across a plain."[44]

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Notes

[1] Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nevada Press, 1995), 133 (translation altered); *L'Ecriture du désastre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), 203. Hereafter cited as *WD* and *ED*, for the English translation and French original respectively.

[2] *WD*, 92 / *ED*, 145.

[3] Throughout this essay, in following Blanchot's reflections and elaborations in *WD/ED*, Emmanuel Levinas' distinction between the saying (*le dire*) and the said (*le dit*) shall be employed [See Levinas' *Otherwise Than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1981); *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (the Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978)].

To put it all too simply, saying is the verbal enactment of expression, while the said is what is received, heard, and understood in the saying. It is important to note that the saying always exceeds every possible said – that saying can never be wholly reduced to what is said. Saying always bears an excess, an un-said, or a pure saying, which shall below be linked to the untranslatable of every translation; the silence and the secret which ever remains in abeyance, un(re)presentable in any said or any translation.

[4] For an examination and explanation of the transformation that the suspended and questioned title of this "scene" underwent before being (re)published in *L'Ecriture du désastre*, see Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Ending and Unending Agony," in *Ending and Unending Agony: On Maurice Blanchot*, trans. Hannes Opelz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 71-74.

5 *Awaiting Oblivion*, trans. John Gregg (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1997), 16; *L'Attente l'oubli* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 27.

6 For considerations and questions of "(A Primal Scene?)" as a testamentary text, see Leslie Hill, *Maurice Blanchot and Fragmentary Writing: A Change of Epoch* (New York: Continuum, 2012), 333; Lacoue-Labarthe, "Ending and Unending Agony," 81; and David Applebaum, *In His Voice: Maurice Blanchot's Affair with the Neuter* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), 31.

7 *WD*, 72 (translation altered) / *ED*, 117.

8 See *WD*, 114 / *ED*, 176, where Blanchot attests to how the term "scene" is ill-chosen, for "what it supposedly names is unrepresentable," escaping the figurable. Cf. Kevin Hart, *The Dark Gaze: Maurice Blanchot and the Sacred* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 52, on the problem of "staging" this "scene."

9 See Christopher Fynsk, *Infant Figures: The Death of the 'Infans' and Other Scenes of Origin* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 72. Cf. *WD*, 71-2 / *ED*, 115-17.

10 Fynsk, *Infant Figures*, 70.

11 Leslie Hill, "'A Fine Madness': Translation, Quotation, the Fragmentary," in *Blanchot Romantique: A Collection of Essays*, ed. John McKeane and Hannes Opelz (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), 211-231.

12 "Blanchot, Speaking in Tongues: Otherness in Translation," *Paroles Gelées* 15.2 (1997), 14.

13 *Ibid*.

14 *Ibid*., 26.

15 Lacoue-Labarthe, "Ending and Unending Agony," 81-2.

16 *Ibid*., 82. Cf. *WD*, 74 / *ED* 120.

17 An elaboration of *le neutre*, as well as the untranslatability of this term, would take us beyond the limits of this essay. For a concise accounting of the *neutre*, and the reasoning behind leaving it untranslated, see Leslie Hill, *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 127-142.

18 Leslie Hill writes that the disaster "marks the very articulation of the possible," (and, we would add, the possibility of articulation) it is not transcendental, however, but rather the mark or wound which mars the transcendental as condition of possibility, as the disaster "necessarily interrupts that movement of possibility like a caesura characterized only by its own impossibility." *Maurice Blanchot and Fragmentary Writing*, 332.

19 *WD*, 5 (translation altered) / *ED*, 14.

20 Cf., in "(A Primal Scene?)," the child's "drawing the curtain" prior to his vertiginous experience (without experience) – his "*écartant le rideau*" (*ED*, 117). We might also hear in this word, '*rideau*,' a blind, or even, perhaps, a veil.

21 Many pages after "(A Primal Scene?)" in *The Writing of the Disaster*, Blanchot will reflect on "the void of sky" from the "scene" in relation to the disaster and its withdrawal: "*the disaster as retreat outside of the sidereal shelter*" (*WD*, 133 (translation altered) / *ED*, 202; italics in original). This further brings the disaster into relation with "(A Primal Scene?)," which we will return to below.

22 *WD*, 33 (translation altered) / *ED*, 58.

23 *WD*, 87 (translation altered) / *ED*, 138. Italics in original.

24 Blanchot elsewhere notes that the secret would be "something still to say, when all has been said; the Saying (with its glorious capital) always in excess of everything said." (*WD*, 137 (translation altered) / *ED*, 208). This "Saying" or "*Dire*" is that Levinasian notion referred to above, in note 3.

I have chosen (with much difficulty) to remain silent on the status of the anonymous dialogues which appear at points throughout *WD/ED*, and from which this remark is excised, as the question extends far beyond the limits of this paper.

25 *WD*, 5 (translation altered) / *ED*, 13.

26 *WD*, 11 (translation altered) / *ED*, 23.

27 Cf. *Ibid*., 38/66.

28 Lacoue-Labarthe stresses that this text "is quite simply *confided*; it calls upon a faith and a fidelity." ("Ending and Unending Agony," 81). Fynsk also bears much discretion to the question of supposition which the text imposes in its opening; see, in particular, *Infant Figures*, 73-75.

We would also direct this question of confiding and trust (of *confiance*), and the faith which it demands (beyond all hope) in relation to the question of death and the absolutely other, to a remark which Lacoue-Labarthe made in 1970, concerning this very question (of death and/as absolute alterity, as well as the fault of names): he writes of a necessity to "accept what cannot be

accepted and try to be faithful to what tolerates only infidelity." ("The Fable (Literature and Philosophy)," trans. Hugh J. Silverman, in *The Subject of Philosophy*, ed. Thomas Trezise (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 13).

[29] Exemplarily by Lacoue-Labarthe and Fynsk. Blanchot himself suggests the reading, while never wholly affirming it, in *WD/ED*, in the fragments where he speaks to Serge Leclaire's psychoanalytic conception of the *infans*. An elaborate exploration of this figure and the relations between Blanchot's "scene" and Leclaire's conception of the death of the *infans* goes beyond the realm of this essay, though Fynsk's book offers much in the way of thoughtful explication and exploration.

[30] Fynsk explicitly notes that "the *infans* does not appear in the "scene" we are invited to suppose," and, moreover, that "it cannot appear." (*Infant Figures*, 70).

[31] *WD*, 67 / *ED*, 110.

[32] Maurice Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond*, trans. Lycette Nelson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 76 (translation altered); *Le pas au-delà* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 107.

[33] Fynsk, *Infant Figures*, 58.

[34] *In His Voice*, 37.

[35] See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Agonie terminée, agonie interminable sur Maurice Blanchot: Suivi de L'émoi* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 2011); *Ending and Unending Agony: On Maurice Blanchot*, trans. Hannes Opelz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).

[36] "Dismay," 111. Italics in original.

[37] *WD*, 114 (translation altered) / *ED*, 177. Italics in original.

[38] *WD*, 137-8 / *ED*, 208. Italics in original.

[39] This untranslatable term might also be rendered as 'the watch,' 'the wake,' or 'the eve.' On the relation of this plurivocal term in relation to writing, the night, and the death of the first-personal subject, see Roger Laporte, *La Veille* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963); and, in relation to Blanchot's *L'Écriture du désastre,* Roger Laporte, *"C'est le désastre obscur qui porte la lumière,"* in *A l'extrême pointe: Proust, Bataille, Blanchot* (Paris: P.O.L., 1998), 85-95.

[40] *WD*, 48 (translation altered) / *ED*, 82.

[41] *WD*, 50 (translation altered) / *ED*, 85. Cf. note 21, above.

[42] *Infant Figures*, 60.

[43] WD, 116 (translation altered) / ED, 179. Italics in original.

[44] Robert Antelme, *L'Espèce humaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), 205; *The Human Race*, trans. Jeffrey Haight and Annie Mahler (Vermont: The Marlboro Press, 1992), 188.

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Translating the Nation: Of Meaning and the Mythic

AYAN CHAKRABORTY

Abstract: While the politics of translation has concerned itself with cultural globalisation, in heterogenous national formations it transcends the myopic conception of language alteration to collective imagination. What is at stake in such structures is that the idea of 'history' is severely contested across one national community with its inherent contradictions. The conflict between an umbrella term against individualities of particular communities poses the centrifugal forces of cultural identities. Herein, the co-ordinates of different identities for one community vis-a-vis its acceptance/ rejection by other communities interrogates what constitutes a larger sense of an umbrella community and how this identity is constructed and stabilized. From a technical sense of literary conception, this is a cause of celebration but a challenge for processes of historicization. In this paper, I look into the fiction of Sidhartha Sharma to understand the curious ordeals of translation as he explores the relationships of identity and language to mainland Indian independence struggle. In his novel, *The Grasshopper's Run* , Sharma risks a double course of translating North Eastern Tribal imagination that thrives through orality (and thus evades documentation like most native cultures) with the processes of transcription. In this endeavour, what is of importance is how meaning gets eroded and newly formed as it is transmitted across cultural barriers.

Keywords: Orality, myth, translation, transcription, nation, meaning, identity

Translation, in the academia, has been contesting the idea of symbolic and cultural transmission since its initial years of epistemological focus. A rather novel field in terms of academic chronology, its involvement in the literary and cultural epistemology has evolved from a sense of inter-cultural comprehension and involvement where the act of 'knowing' the 'othered' figure becomes significant. As true to its political implications, the newly 'autonomized' discipline runs beyond a simpler study in trans-cultural achievements and duly entangles itself in the nuances of the post-colonial lineage. To be sure, 'translation' as used in scientific branches, involves the 'transmission' of source material to the target plane without necessarily modifying or editing the constitutive components. But as social sciences and humanities fails to exclude the inexorable principles of subjectivity and identity, the nuanced grid of collective consciousness across ethnographic demarcations calls for critical attention.

Since in my paper, I tend to limit myself to the ideological plane of the Indian Republic in general and the geographical plane of the North Eastern Indian landscape in particular, a complimentary investigation of situational fluidity requires a subtler intelligibility of plural cultures. The concept of the Indian nation state, in historical time, has strived to deal with multiplicity of regional principalities that jostle, compliment and draw contrast to each other. A short ethnographic study is possibly sufficient to illuminate the cultural-linguistic similarities in adjacent topographies that gradually aggravate in the contrarian spectrum as we move further from each geographical point of reference. Here, as we may understand, the cultural medium of communication lies in the discourse that in turn is constituted by varied semiotics. The order of language that takes into account not only the arrangement of words in syntax but also issues of phonetic transcription, regional sensibilities and cultural ethos and that in short implies the very 'materiality of discourse'.[1]

As most basic pedagogy on translatory problems suggest that the task of an anthropologist or linguist/translator involves greater constraints owing to various factors that transcend the simpler visibility of language alteration, the reductive view regarding 'easiness' loses steam.[2] And in a multilingual nation like India, this 'difference' of societal conceptions are beyond processes of condensation. With India's stratified pre-colonial-colonial-anti-colonial history, the urge for 'documentation' has emerged as the most viable source in the politics of history, of generation and re-generation against claims and counter-claims. This is instrumental to the 'logic' of this paper for what I try to look into is not just 'translation' through language but of ideas that might rupture popular understanding to what constitutes a community. Added to that, the fluid process of analysis and argumentation is more cumbersome as the text that I look at tries to connect 'oral' belief system (almost a mythic form) to this already arduous enterprise.[3] Here, the idea of the 'mythic' harps back to a golden past that is recorded in divergent and conflicting faith in detailed events. The obscuration of details brings under question the veracity of the event itself and what we are left with is the 'idea' of it though the wisdom from that idea of the event remains similar across native imagination. I discuss what constitutes ethnic identity through culture/language against the national belief system and the (im)possibilities of translation between them.

The idea of nationhood has been subjected to various interpretations as a locus of contestation across ideological divides. The 'interpretations' that we talk about are not instances of just re-reading an ethos on the basis of providences or what we call objective 'facts' but a process of 'translation' from one understanding to the other. For example, while the ideas of Western nationhood have governed notions of the 'territorial', ethnic and constitutional nationalism, Asian political system has looked into the domain of cultural ethos with an overarching intent. But the fact that there cannot be only one 'language' of 'national' sentiment in vastly diversified societies make the process of semantic and symbolic translation both precious and precarious. Here, the idea of symbolic associations with common totems of 'fixedty' in meaning is different for each ethnic principality. With each regional imagination being 'fixed' but in differential politics to the other, the idea of what really can form a 'shared' cultural experience remains a conundrum. As my argument addresses the fundamental observation of what is really 'national' in a diversified nation, I look upon the problem of 'un-translability' in a territorial community not only through language but through meaning and sentiments.

The Indian subcontinent has had featured as a prominent region of study in all major anti-colonial endeavours. Given its variety of cultural, economic and ethnic identities, the landmass inarguably plays a very significant role in experimenting with identity complexes and political affinities. Its sudden and unprecedented conditions in demarcation of what constitutes self and 'us' as opposed to 'them' and 'theirs' have been elements of wild guesses in psephology and has posed thwarted attempts at behavioural politics. Such study that accounts for defining what is 'history' for one community against the other, what methods of 'historicization' is required to build societies in truth (and that without eliminating the other), and where, to borrow its substance from. Moreover, these divergences are as much as in historical belief systems as in linguistic and dialectic variances or their concomitant realities. For no probabilities can define why a community upholds linguistic association as superior over religion whereas its neighbouring population does exactly the contrarian or say where economic or caste consolidation implodes a community into class and political strifes as against an overarching and often militant nationalism is impossible without diligent and perpetual study. In short the discourse of translation is cultural, collective and specific; these border on the insider/outsider divide. For my paper, I have taken up a very curious and probably unique exercise in ' translative historicity'

that relates to the times of the Second World War and the Indian independence movement. Again, this would be through the literature of the communities that is mediated by the author-narrator. For where history writing is a game of probabilities and strategies, translating literature might be closer to shared 'truth' in the experience of a community. I look at Siddhartha Sarma's award winning and popular fiction *The Grasshopper's Run* to look at identity definitions and community imagination.

As Sarma himself speaks in the introductory note, the novel that he writes has been partly fictionalized on one of the numerous stories he came across in his visit to the land.[4] The myth of some 'fire' and 'water', a treasured belief of the Nagas, is used as an allegory to the plot. Sarma, himself an Assamese, has built his fiction mostly in the hilly terrains of what is today's North Eastern India, weaving state capitals like Imphal (Manipur), Kohima (Nagaland) and a part of the plains like the noted towns of Dimapur (Assam) and Jorhat (Assam) at the heart of the narrative. For efforts in plot construction, the narrative briefly stretches onto Calcutta (Kolkata, West Bengal) but for purely political causes. Calcutta still retained its position as a significant city in India and the most prominent name in the landscape for eastern British India in 1944. And being one of the chief of the three British Presidencies, its function to impart missionary education in all its 'civilizational philanthropy' with Western formative ideals was undeniably powerful. Our narrative locates our protagonist by the name of Gojen as a student in one of the Calcutta missionary schools, with an Assamese birth and a more fervid North Eastern sense of association. The narrative that stretches over some smooth two hundred pages recounts a great tale of friendship between Gojen and his childhood friend, Uti who belongs to one of the Naga tribes, the Aos.

Unlike Gojen, Uti never found a chance at Western education. And with his inherent heroism staging a stiff battle against the Japanese in the very prologue of the novella, this provides the text with the very intent and direction for the latter pages. Uti's character occurs more than a few times within the present narrative that is framed after his death and that mostly through the psycho-intuitive conversations between Gojen and him. What is interesting is the idea in Gojen to relate back to his North Eastern origins despite having the privilege of a more 'tamed' but pivotal chance at British education. Gojen's projection as an 'elephant' (his name a master signifier) with his keen acumen in sensory reception and weapon-wielding sets the very tone of the narrative that challenges the notions of a community's foundational promise. The image of a wild animal against a Western system of education that, for all, talks about 'taming' civility is perhaps a microcosmic indication of the broader structure of tension in the narrative. For Gojen, his identity as a missionary student belonged to the Christian religion but not-so Christian upbringing. In that we witness a state of flux. Twice in the narration, the narrator mentions about the uneasy but settled idea of the Christian faith; Gojen's father talks about how the 'Ingraz' came in to destroy their 'stones' but "of course, we are Christians now and we shall continue to be."[5] The idea of Christianity in a religious worldview jostles with the idea of pagan sensibilities where in the north-eastern green, every animal and plant, and rocks connoted some idea of ecological balance and 'original' system of survival.[6]

However, this tension in religious affiliation may have a greater role to play given Gojen's induction into British connections and a larger sense of alignment with the British in the struggle against the Japanese. Now, this directly takes us to the core of the narrative. Gojen's return to Jorhat, his encounters with all the variety of Naga tribes is a logical conclusion of the Prologue where Uti is murdered by the Japanese under Colonel Mori, the villain of the piece. In addition, the entire tribal village of Uti was massacred weapon-less. The hills were being contested by the Imperial British and Japanese armies and are secure for our historicising impulse to that extent. However, what complicates the problem is the historical fact that the Japanese Army were working in tandem with the Indian

National Army (founded and actively guided by Subhas Chandra Bose) in men and money and enjoyed massive popular support from plain-land Indians.[7] This draws the conversation to the nuances of identities and affiliations. Gojen's religious identity as a Christian, his cultural inclination towards Indo-Burmese traditions and the question of citizenship as an Indian complicates these tales of Indian Independence.

   Gojen's understanding of his tribal lineage bestows him with the 'exclusiveness' of belonging to the Aho tribe. To him, the 'Ingraz' and the Japanese are as alien to his community as the 'Indians'. There are at least a couple of references where the tribes point to the independence struggle as a political phenomenon that would affect the 'Indians' and not them. This finds resonance through the character of Gojen as well. "*There are not many of them (Indians) with the Japani in the hills yet. Anyway, if they think such people will help them after the Ingraz are defeated...but it is not our concern. Leave them alone.*" or " *The Indians may even get independence after this they are saying."* [8] Territorially, today's North-Eastern India, with all its intermittent separatist sentiments, were claimed by the Indian National Army as the frontier states of liberation in the struggle against the British.[9] In this, the idea of 'India' is a point of contention in Sarma's work as well. His alternative view of the independence struggle locates these Naga communities who were, at best, unperturbed by the question of colonial rule and thus served as sources of counter-narratives in an otherwise engineered homogenous struggle. To them, the question of 'sovereignty' was constricted to their tribes and their land, their history recorded defeat at the hands of the British and subsequent massacres by the Japanese to whom the Indian National Army alleged its loyalty. Interestingly, throughout the narrative, undertones of proximity to the British is neutralised by the logic of the hostile Japanese invasions who 'slaughtered' tribal villages without mercy.

   The tension between the Japanese and the Naga tribes does not rest on the plank of British allegiance. For them, the massacres of their tribes, the repeated incursions into the remotest of territories and perhaps, the idea of a new mode of colonisation contributed to the Nagas' unprecedented hostility with the Japanese army. Significantly, they were aware of the Indian collaborative endeavours with the Japanese. Hence, what can be roughly interpreted as the sense of 'Indianness' did not become a part of the tribal imagination; in this the ideas of legality and political praxis would strictly be 'non-modern' and steeped into community culture. In the novella, the fact that the Japanese were dismantling the underpinnings of tribal culture with 'visible violence', played a major role in the open hostility towards the Japanese-Indian collaboration. In the case of the British, the efficacies of the colonisation technique was perhaps rooted less in open violence than with a combination of epistemological violence with a greater deal of physical autonomy. The incursion and superimposition of Western Enlightenment education over native sensabilities is a violence done to break both culture and identity through discourses of epistemology and enlightenment. For the British, as both Innuk and Meren cites, the uneasiness was more conceptual and embarked upon through negotiations. Such negotiations were political, cultural and community-based. For instance, they had adopted the religion of the British but were stridently opposed to their worldview about life with the idea of 'modernity'. Again, to say that the tribes had successfully warded off the perils of cultural imperialism would be incorrect with the 'civilizing' impulses that now, slowly but steadily contested with tribal livelihood. In their native imagination, the land that they belonged to were not of the British, the Japanese or the Indians though a part of the revenue lied with the British officials. So the loss of 'sovereignty' was not a defeat for the sovereign imagination. This would be better delineated in their sense of community imagination about which I will discuss later.

   The question of modernity/non-modernity is also ramified in the struggle for keeping one's formative identity unharmed while meeting the requirements of survival. For

instance, we have a glimpse of Naga warriors who take on bows and arrows that represent the conscious sense of identity that the tribes wanted to preserve. On the other hand, the idea of an uncomfortable but rather irreversible change with modern ammunition is more than copiously dealt with in the text. At least six of the seventeen chapters predominantly deal with the various kinds of rifles and cartridges, of grenades and bombs, all that signify a new dimension of warfare.[11] To think that wars never transpired in the remote depths of North East Indian valleys during pre-colonial times is a positive fallacy; the text talks about the warring tribes with various disputes including territories and these have been recounted more than once by the third person narrator. However, none of these wars of supremacy had routed out the ideas of co-existence or indulged in unreasoned killings and that will take us back to tribal cultural ethos.

The tribal ideas compose the largest section of the text. The provision that there can be no definite or absolute views of the times, not monolithic nor bipolar, is perhaps the greater intent weaving the work. At the centre of the narrative, we find the Naga tribes, with Ao being the chief tribe under depiction. Right from the initial pages, the narrator is particular about the uses of imagery and planes of analogies. Of course, Gojen is thus the hunter boy who takes upon himself to avenge the death of a tribe which was led by his friend Uti and his father. In the free, indirect discourse of the narrator, he is the 'elephant' who could read his circumstances better than those around him and could paint a target where the seniors across the tribes failed. Much of the narrative is about a deathless equation with Uti who being the skilled 'runner' and a tremendously agile warrior, had also been a martyr that had battled the Japanese hard before his own death. Other prominent characters across tribes like that of Meren, Imnuk, Imnukubla, the Konyak, the Angami, Shilukaba, have been offered to the readers with unmistakeable affinity towards nature. To note, these tribes belong to various regions in the text. The Konyaks were Burmese for instance whereas the Aos still had their dominant settlements in Assam while the Angamis were more Kohima based. With brief and bantering mentions of the rivalry within these tribes, the collective and shared histories of their existence was mediated by nature. This undoubtedly condensed the struggle to create the insider/outsider binary in questions of colonial interests and tribal sovereignty.

This, in fact, extends the dichotomy of the 'epistemological violence' that characterised the identity of the hilly tribes. While the introductory chapter sheds light on the Western system of education , a dichotomy is raised right from the succeeding chapters regarding it and this idea perpetuates till the closure of the text. To cite some instances, if we look at Chapter 2, there is a passage where Gojen recounts his life in the hills where as opposed to British system of believing in one absolute narrative, he accepted various tales as 'truth'. "*For Gojen, who knew much fiction tan his grandfather, anything that was possible might have happened, but not everything anyone said was possible. For him the truth lay in the forest, in what he saw, felt or heard. Beyond that anything was not much considering.*"[12] Or, in Chapter Eight, the narrator remarks " *These villages were familiar to him even if only vague outlines cannot be seen. He remembered practically each land, pond and creek in this area. Some parts of the hills were also familiar...*"[13] Here, two quick things are obvious. First that this multiplicity of narratives did not mean 'anything' that was told but those that were experienced. In this legitimate binary between what we may call *theoria* in the western canon would hold lesser value to Gojen than that which was taught or the idea of *phronesis*. Similarly, the narrator invests on detailed sections on Gojen's relation to Uti's tribe, his early tribal education in the hills, the stay in the *morung* and the tales he heard from Uti's grandmother.

While commenting on Gojen's British education, Shilukaba had asked Gojen to point out the differences between British and tribal hunts. Gojen's inability to answer made him assert, "*In the hills they hunt or food. Sometimes they go out for a long while not knowing*

for certain if they will get food for their families...People like you, like the Ingraz, hunt because its fun. Specially the Ingraz: they hunt with people who scare the game out in the open, with dogs and drums. The Ingraz just sits in a comfortable place and the scared animal just runs out to be shot...I have shown many men how to hunt but they did not deserve their kills..." he said that one could make it deserving "*by not making things easy, by not having bearers and dogs to do the work for you, by becoming a part of the swamps and taking as much discomfort as the birds you hunt live with. By making yourself and the birds equal.*"[14] With repudiating the discourse on excesses, they bore with them the idea of them as legitimate bearers of the land and its nature. "*The Aos are an ancient people, even in a land where ancient means really ancient and the histories of nations stretch far back through time. Ao or Aor , in their language, they say, means 'those who came before' as opposed to Mirirs or 'those who came after'...*"[15] Or again, Meren says in Chapter 10, "*Boy, the Ingraz came here because they wanted to create protection for India. A buffer area, they call it. They came to your lands for the wood and coal and oil. The hills are under him, yes, but the hills don't belong to them, because they do not really love the hills. It is not their home. You have to belong to the land before the land belongs to you.*"[16]

Through this, the idea of superlative affiliation to the hills also occurs amongst the tribes, in the lands and through the various differences in dialects that serve as identity makers and cultural signifiers. Also significant is the fact that the Konyak and the Angami are particular individuals who play important roles in Gojen's fight to hunt down Mori, the Japanese officer who slaughtered masses. These characters are never named individually but called after the name of the tribe. This, too, insinuates at the idea of the collective against individual motives, a rather post-modern discussion. Interestingly, Mori was the pivotal figure against whom Gojen and the tribal wrath was directed, without a blind cause for Japanese massacre. This idea of debunking generalisations is perhaps far more modern than modernity has had offered through its meta-narratives. The tenets of tribal 'education' remains a case to study when Gojen extinguishes his impulse to murder Mori while taking away his dearest possession, his knife. Hence, Gojen as the native, dealt with narratives in psychological study as well.

To make the culminating point in the text is to look again at the idea of myths and legends that directly associate with the multiplicity in narratives and in turn influence the belief system in aboriginal thought. The idea of orality and story-telling is perhaps the greatest exercise in the functions of historicization that does not claim historical information through concrete particulars but rely on history as 'wisdom from the ancients.' This idea of storytelling that occurs in Walter Benjamin's opinion regarding monopoly of information as against the 'wisdom' of story-telling also ironically marks international wars as the break in community function. Our text suits his idea very well. And the grasshopper silently playing witness to the turbulence between the fire from the east and water from the west makes it the original bearer of tradition and of custom much like how Gojen creates history by his sheer force of will amid the British and the Japanese. Thus this part of Indian history is 'real' without its 'Indianness' and with a story without its records.

What concerns us here can be studied on two planes. First, the question of oral translation that runs overtly throughout the text. The Naga tribes historicize their love for the land through myths and legends, those that have never been put to documentation. Here, this is not an exceptional case of ethnic imagination if we attempt to relate to most native civilizations across the globe. Most of the effects of community association were ritualistic and language played a pivotal role in community participation. Here, if we look at the character of Gojen , we might notice that his attempts to gather strength is through the 'etymological' understanding of the names and traits of these tribes, their explication and legitimization of the sensory world around them , their understanding of tribal spirit—all through tribal articulations and a curious process of meaning formation that fell heavy on

colonial 'rationality'. This efficacy of tribal resilience is through a common semantic intent despite the use of divergent tribal languages and dialects. This also means that inter-tribal linguistic similarities/differences were bridged upon through a convergent process of meaning and sentiment catalysed by an effect of common historical situations. To that extent, the narrative is an anti-colonial statement that thrives on 'orality' and translation of the mythic against the Western impulses of documentation and their 'truth' to knowledge.

What is also interesting here is that the kind of language that Sarma himself has used. Writing in the colonial language with an attempt to 'minorize the major' in his linguistic enterprise, Sarma attempts to capture the verve and rhythm of the tribal languages, especially the Mongsen and Chungli, which has a different syntactic pattern to that of English. Following the SOV pattern as opposed to SVO in English, Sarma must have run a tough task in adopting short and energetic sentences to enter into tribal imagination. Here, we might note that the author had accessed these oral belief-systems through the stories from Naga lips which means that he had to translate linguistic sensoriness of the tribes into English and then transcribe words in text—a case of double displacement. The inability to duly translate one language into other is not a process of technical representation but a process of cultural transmission that works through the silences and statements, the overt and covert suggestions of language, gestures and expressions. Translation creates new meaning in the target language while eroding some from the source language in its creating a new aperture in another cultural system. Hence meaning becomes volatile in translation as it cuts across different audiences and becomes even more cumbersome when they challenge the expectations of a national community. And here we have another crucial point to discuss.

The fact that the boundaries of us/them, the Nagas and the Indians betray the 'intent' of the community that collectively can be considered as part of a nation. Without just referring to Anderson's understanding of it, what is really 'intransmissable' here is if there can be any effective language of sentiments that can be received and understood without the biases within one community (here the Indian cultural community). In this context, variations are just not regional and linguistic but also about the collective sentiments that bind a community together. The question then is can there be a community without commonalities, specially when the fulcrum of the cultural sentiment is at stake? Translation, then, is not just technical in this regard but largely existential. It is cultural, political and polemical. The 'failures' in translating particular and contrarian histories onto a plane of co-existence is where a narrow parochial germination of attitudinal violence takes place. To all those who appropriate the term 'Indians' and distribute the label, the adverse impulses towards the INA and the insecure detachment towards the mainland anti-colonial struggle might well slip into sedition within the modern state. Where does this lead us to then? The grounds of 'intransmissibilty' of values, mutual respect and the importance of the centrifugal forces within a community to keep it alive. The greater project of translation is to locate and accept not just ideas and values but alternate historical strains within a dominant History.

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Notes

[1] Foucauldian materiality of discourse.

[2] Cultural translation theory.

[3] Here, the idea of the 'mythic' harps back to a golden past that is recorded in divergent and conflicting faith in detailed events. The obscuration of details brings under question the veracity of the event itself and what we are left with is the 'idea' of it though the wisdom from that idea of the event remains similar across native imagination.

[4] Siddhartha Sharma, *The Grasshopper's Run* , New Delhi: Scholastic India Pvt. Limited, 2009, 3.

[5] Siddhartha Sharma, *The Grasshopper's Run* , New Delhi: Scholastic India Pvt. Limited, 2009, 58

[6] Original here refers to the origins of narratives that native populations seek and assert to legitimize and for understanding nature and the world for what it is. Hence a greater degree of association with nature is very emblematic in such belief system.

[7] For a greater understanding of the INA movement, See: Peter Ward Fay, *The Forgotten Army: India's Armed Struggle For Independence*, University Of Michigan Press, 1995

[8] Siddhartha Sharma, *The Grasshopper's Run* , New Delhi: Scholastic India Pvt. Limited, 2009, 62.

[9] See: Peter Ward Fay, *The Forgotten Army: India's Armed Struggle For Independence*, University Of Michigan Press, 1995.

[10] The incursion and superimposition of Western Enlightenment education over native sensabilities is a violence done to break both culture and identity through discourses of epistemology and enlightenment.

[11] Siddhartha Sharma, *The Grasshopper's Run*, New Delhi: Scholastic India Pvt. Ltd., 2009, Ch. 3, 4, 6, 7-9, 12-14, 16.

[12] Siddhartha Sharma, *The Grasshopper's Run*, New Delhi: Scholastic India Pvt. Ltd., 2009, 35.

[13] Siddhartha Sharma, *The Grasshopper's Run*, New Delhi: Scholastic India Pvt. Ltd., 2009, 91.

[14] Siddhartha Sharma, *The Grasshopper's Run*, New Delhi: Scholastic India Pvt. Ltd., 2009, 44.

[15] Siddhartha Sharma, *The Grasshopper's Run*, New Delhi: Scholastic India Pvt. Ltd., 2009, 53.

[16] Siddhartha Sharma, *The Grasshopper's Run*, New Delhi: Scholastic India Pvt. Ltd., 2009, 109.

[17] See: Walter Benjamin, "Introduction" to "The Story-Teller", *The Story-Teller: Tales Of Loneliness*, (New Delhi: Verso Books) 2016, 10-15.

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Disapparition I: The National Idiom and the Translatability of Culture

TYLER CORREIA

Abstract: Jacques Derrida's contributions to the philosophy of translation give voice to a constellation of absences, silences, and secrets in language and culture, through which the question of translation marks a perennial and meaningful site of analysis. In the following, I offer one such analysis of the question of translation of the 'object' of culture alongside the implicit description of a national idiom as part of a problematic around what I call *disapparition*. Beyond what would otherwise seem at first to bear the specificity of a technical discourse, consideration of the general problematic of the notion of translation offers pause for reflection on persisting questions of the transmissibility as opposed to the 'borders' of languages, where careful analysis uncovers a host of issues in the spacing, gaps, losses and accumulations of meaning that take place. Rather than maintaining the assertion that 'a culture cannot be translated,' and attending to a particular nationalist reasoning that underpins it, I argue instead that translation must be conceived as foundational for thinking on language, culture and philosophy.

Keywords: Disapparition, culture object, national idiom, translatability, Jacques Derrida

Introduction

Current philosophical debate around the possibility or impossibility of translation have focused on the intersections between philosophical and political questions: the problem of the *philosopheme's* foreignness to its own origin (Johnson); the interdiction against translation embedded in the delimiting of sacral and poetic languages (Kilito); the uneasy space opened for resituating translation in light of 'world literature' (Apter, *Against World Literature*); particularly in relation to translation as a refusal of colonization and imperialism, a reassertion of the responsibility of a postcolonial agent (Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*).[1] Scholars have not always dealt directly, however, with the repetition of the image of a nation-statist framework within a system of global linguistic affairs first observed by Jacques Derrida[2] even when this phenomenon is prominently recognized.[3] The looming pressure of the nation-state bears heavily on the question of translatability; where the world is divided into linguistic communities coterminous with the division of national communities. Often, this is the ground upon which the assertion of untranslatability stands, a position that upholds a practice of delineation of the national community by protecting its national idiom.

Nevertheless, increasingly scholarship in philosophy,[4] alongside the humanities and social sciences generally, have taken on the grand task of exploring and extricating research from the implicit tendencies of nationalist projects.[5] Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick-Schiller have offered a framework for the critique of sociological and anthropological research produced with an implicit nation-statist frame, while also observing the enduring thread of a latent transnationalism (302). So, too, we place into question a philosophy of 'untranslatability' in which it is proposed that a language as national idiom exists so remotely 'of its own,' as such a self-standing entity, that the prospect of its translation into another

is unthinkable. What is translation such that our vision is clouded at the borders of the nation-state, the jealous protection of a national idiom, the interdiction against translation? In posing the question of translation we are asking how cultural production, the space opened uniquely by texts and their linguistic forms, *risk*—rather than protect—a culture by bringing it to its own margin and away from its center, and how the assertion of untranslatability occludes the fact that what is being translated also serves as the ground upon which this object is rendered present. In this way, we inaugurate a shift toward thinking a fundamental translational activity that precedes the jealous guarding of a cultural artifact *as if* coded as the metonymic protection of the national 'unit' itself.

From this vantage point, it would seem even at the outset that one must take sides in translation—between a suspect process of globalizing homogenization and a suspect process of nationalization,[6] but also between an established banal nationalism[7] and the open possibility of a cosmopolitan thinking of translation.[8] This crisis constitutes the very structure of what we call 'a culture,' a grand risk of going outside of itself, and one that is representative of both the possibility to lose oneself or one's culture, and the fact of translation as centrally-in-between cultures, standing as the very structure of language itself.[9] Scholars like Emily Apter[10] who contend with the hazard of an *a priori* presumption of a plural discourse of world literatures without a practice, one that rests heavily on the exportation of the English language alone, and already offers a synthetic reading of translation studies—navigating deftly both the nationalist presumption and a superficial assertion of 'world literature' in translation. So, too, we find in Derrida's works the acute sense that an uncritical interpretation of the notion of cosmopolitanism—particularly from the vantage of a globalized age—is one that contributes to the continued homogenization of a world of translation, and of difference, into an Anglo-American hegemony, rather than one that gestures toward a more fruitful planetary cosmopolitic.[11]

Yet, a looming concern remains through which the open possibility of translation is threatened by a primordial foreclosure, which demands that one retread old ground to come to new conclusions, where a *neither/nor* of national or world literatures will not have the balanced effect presumed. Instead, a 'universal refusal' operates asymmetrically on the (im)possibility of translation of a national language, particularly where the already-political act of asserting untranslatability is grounded in the structure of an authority that bears the capacity to do so—untranslatability is not asserted in/for any idiom and not all languages are afforded the same protections. Thus, another hazard is outlined by Arjun Appadurai: "the simplification of these many forces (and fears) of [globalization as] homogenization can also be exploited by nation-states in relation to their own minorities, by posing global commoditization (or capitalism, or some other such external enemy) as more 'real' than the threat of its own hegemonic strategies" (296). Appadurai speaks to the strategic effect of an already entrenched national fabric from which an emergent global system—of politics, economics, cultures—comes into being. From this vantage point, we remain in an asymmetrical sense to need to take sides in translation and for translation.

Finally, to orient the discussion to follow, we might carve two lines of inquiry. First, if translation were to take place, what is it that would be translated? We pose for consideration, the problematic of the 'object of culture,' which we might assert is the object subjected to disapparition (in Derrida's terms, that which is placed *under erasure* [*sous rature*][12])—it does not exist at the moment it is asserted to have existed, it is absent at the moment it is declared present. The 'culture-object,' regardless, is that which, in the analysis of translation, is the focus or object of research such that the gaze of this focus produces its object, and conversely, outside of the sphere of this analytical consideration, tends to fade into oblivion, or into the scene beyond its careful delineation—its place amongst others.

Two poles might be outlined even at this pre-emptive stage, to orient this line of inquiry. Firstly, under analysis, the culture object is placed *under erasure*—as that thing whose

being is in question, as that which may remain standing or fall under such analysis, and whose presence or absence must be posed itself—that is, the 'culture object' is that 'thing' which is asserted to exist only within the *ethos* of a culture. It is in this way that the culture-object is found to be exteriorized in its 'being' as a representative of 'its' culture, 'its' national idiom. As well, outside of analysis, the culture-object seemingly fades *as such*—not in its presence but in its representation—so that its 'everyday' character may be asserted beyond its placement within the fabric of a national idiom, of the representative of a culture, as member to an absent scene. It is in this latter sphere (wherein the necessity for the culture-object *as such* dissipates) that its creative possibilities are assured in translation.

Second, if the problematic and the notion of translation is to be found to be more ubiquitous than expected, how might translation fare in light of the question of difference, as a matter of difference beyond the scope of translation between national idioms? Our last paragraph has left us in suspense; what is this 'in translation' that has returned? How is 'translation' taking place in an everyday speech which assuredly also holds itself within, shelters itself inside of a well-assured national idiom? How is translation of a text taking place already within this idiom? We propose tentatively to answer this question with a rehearsal of Derrida's comments on language and experience as translational activities— from the pre-experiential phenomenon to the 'sign' and 'meaning' [*Bedeutung*] in Husserl, but also as *iterable*, in which the sign itself as the guarantor of meaning is repeatable, risking meaning itself in an ever-present possibility of translation.

Two Controversies of Translation: *The "Neutral" Problem*

Friedrich Schleiermacher opens his 1813 lecture "On the Different Methods of Translation"[13] by declaring a line of inquiry on the question of translation he will subsequently dismiss. He notes that an intra-linguistic translation activity must still take place even between contemporaries "who are not separated by dialects but who come from different social classes that have very little contact and who are far apart in their education" (36). Thus, an act of interpretation (if not, for Schleiermacher, a 'true' act of translation) takes place between two even sharing in an idiom and a dialect. Still, some manner of understanding must be made, no longer in the substitution of signs—not in finding the appropriate supplementary words—but in revaluating the constellation of words shared such that two individuals can be brought onto common ground. In fact, before he will set aside this thorny difficulty, he notes an even greater one: "Occasionally, we must translate even our own words, when we want to make them our very own again" (37). The fact of difference is not only apparent between two subjects intra-linguistically (sharing an idiom), but within 'one' subject who becomes foreign to themselves—whose language seems no longer to 'represent' them—and must take on the translational-interpretive work of reappropriating their own self-understanding, perhaps over time.

Schleiermacher then dismisses these intra-linguistic dimensions as not bearing on the issue of translation directly. Why would he be so quick to draw such a distinction, and to leave aside the notion of interpretation—a notion that could easily be the category of (or a sub-category to) that of translation? He offers two responses. First, a generalizable question of the notion of translation in relation to interpretation—wherein one is compelled by "that necessity to translate even within one's own language and dialect" (ibid.)—is simply too large to handle. Furthermore, it would seem that interpretation and translation are distinct (if not entirely separate) activities corresponding to different realms of life. As he states:

> The interpreter's job is in the business world and that of the true translator in the area of scholarship and the arts. Those who find these definitions arbitrary—considering that interpreting is usually understood to mean oral transferral and translating the transplantation of written works—will forgive me for using them, since they respond quite well to the

present need and since the two definitions are not particularly far removed from each other. Writing is appropriate for the fields of scholarship and the arts because writing gives their works permanence. To transfer scholarly and artistic works orally would be as useless as it seems impossible. For business transactions, on the other hand, writing is only a mechanical device. In this case, oral exchanges are the most appropriate ones, and written interpreting should basically be considered only a transcript of oral interpreting. (37-38)

The two realms Schleiermacher makes note of—that of business against that of scholarship and artistry—correspond also to the separation of the *spoken* against the *written* word, and where—contrary to Derrida's thesis borne out in the *Grammatology*—it is the written word that bears a sort of privilege; of translatability certainly, but also of permanence, and the prestige of beauty (art) and knowledge (scholarship). But so, it would also seem that writing bears the heavy mark of translation because of the immense separation between texts on a cross-linguisitic or inter-linguistic level, whereas the deployment of speech (oral/vocal) even between two (business) subjects of different languages and dialects benefit merely from relying on interpretation.[14] In contrast, the written work requires a cipher, the addition of a third party, whereas the spoken word requires no such heavy-handed medium; the need for a "true translator" is posed only for writing, for scholarship, for the arts—for all that wants for permanence.

But Schleiermacher has also noted that one desires permanence even at the most intimate level, which requires once again the redoubled commitment to a form of (self-)translation. It would seem the intimacy within the 'one' of a single subject[15] is not enough to stave off the necessity for translation. This is even more so the case because, as he mentions:

Every human being is, on the one hand, in the power of the language he speaks; he and his whole thinking are a product of it. He cannot, with complete certainty, think anything that lies outside the limits of language. The form of his concepts, the way and means of connecting them, is outlined for him through the language in which he is born and educated; intellect and imagination are bound by it. On the other hand, however, every freethinking and intellectually spontaneous human being also forms the language himself. (38)

Retaining the sense of an autonomous transcendental subject, Schleiermacher has proposed to reconcile this with a form of linguistic determinism that makes its way into the problem of translation. No longer is one an unconditioned subject free of constraint—one who does not need to concern themselves with the decay of memory, the defamiliarization of the sign which grounds the compelled desire to reappropriate it in the first place—but instead a subject fundamentally subjected-to-language.

Accordingly, we might approach the problem of translation slightly differently, to refuse to dismiss what Schleiermacher has set aside too quickly. This would be to not only deal with the movement of an object from one context to another—the translation of the 'sign,' the 'word'—but the emergence of the 'thing' in light of its relation to the subject-of-language, a context which cannot be reduced to linguistic, cultural, or national delineation, but *is that very delineation as an act of interpretive translation*. That is, the presumption that translation takes place only between nationally delineated languages seems—practically—to be opposed to another act of translation taking place in the midst of one, as a fundamental relation between the 'self' and itself, the 'self' and its world. Derrida outlines a problematic of translation in his seminars on hospitality, the contention between language and language, between personal and national idiom, in a similar way to Schleiermacher:

In the broad sense, the language in which the foreigner is addressed or in which he is heard, if he is, is the ensemble of culture, it is the values, the norms, the meanings that inhabit the language. Speaking the same language is not only a linguistic operation. It's a matter of *ethos* generally. A passing remark: without speaking the same national language, someone can be less "foreign" to me if he shares a culture with me, for instance, a way of life linked to

a degree of wealth, etc., than some fellow citizen or compatriot who belongs to what used to be called (but this language shouldn't be abandoned too quickly, even if it does demand critical vigilance) another "social class." In some respects at least, I have more in common with a Palestinian bourgeois intellectual whose language I don't speak than with some French person who, for this or that reason, social, economic, or something else, will be more foreign to me in some kinds of connection. Conversely, if we take language in the strict sense, which doesn't include nationality, a bourgeois Israeli intellectual will be more foreign to me than a Swiss worker, a Belgian farm laborer, a boxer from Quebec, or a French detective. This question of language, in the sense we are calling narrow—namely, the discursive idiom that is not coextensive with citizenship (French and Quebecois, or English and American people can basically speak the same language)—we would always find implicated, in endless ways, in the experience of hospitality. (133)

Unlike Schleiermacher, for Derrida there *is* a context from which the issue of parallel (inter/intra-linguistic) translations can be posed. The argumentative thrust of his work, *Voice and Phenomenon*, relies upon the recognition of an implicit constellation of translational activities taking place in Edmund Husserl's foundational work on phenomenology. In this piece, he enumerates the fundamental translational activities it would seem that Husserl wishes not to contend with between the *moment*, *indication* and *expression*—the crossing, between each 'event,' from one to the other that results in the possibility of *meaning* [*Bedeutung*]—translational activities that both take place within, and also profoundly disrupt, Husserl's transcendental subject of phenomenology. Between each, there are chasms marked by Husserl's silence. These crossings—where the 'moment' must be translated into an interpretable (useable) sign for the sake of *indication*, and where this indicative function must pass over to the creative capacities of a free subject who *means-to-say* [vouloir-dire, Derrida's translation of the German *Bedeutung*]— imply an insurmountable interior-exterior problem for his framework. Only after this has been done can a—now no longer—'transcendental' subject be posed *per se*. In this way, Husserl does not necessarily, himself, construct a fully fledged theory of the sign, of signification, or of a linguistic order of phenomenology. Yet, at each turn of his development of a groundwork method of phenomenology, Derrida uncovers these translational activities taking place—both in the system and in the world (the subject-formation, the *epochal* world of the subject-of-phenomena, the *transcendental ego*) that system describes. Such a discovery seems both to be aligned with Schleiermacher's discussion of the interior subjective activity of translation, and one posed as the key starting point for a problematic of translation and the possibility of experience that undermines Schleiermacher's original dismissal. A discussion of translation does not begin with a cultural institution against an economic one, but in the very groundwork of human experience.

We might present these concatenating translations Derrida uncovers in Husserl's work as follows: first, the translation of *experience* from the '*moment*,' the 'picture-taking' activity somewhere between the blink of an eye and the processes of the mind where, for example, the incomprehensible impression of a tree becomes an intelligible phenomenon; second, simultaneously and conditionally, the translation of *indication* from *experience*, which is marked by a form of designation, in this case with the sign 'tree,' and where for the first time the phenomenon becomes intelligible at all; third, the translation of *expression* from *indication*, the translational activity which ultimately begets *meaning* (the *vouloir-dire* as *Bedeutung*) and where meaning is defined through expression which occludes its origins. 'Expression' is defined as the use of a sign under the presumption that its 'origin' is from within a transcendental subject, which is to say, only after this translational process has progressed far enough to no longer recognize an object exterior to the subject before the Husserlian 'moment'. Through 'expression', the sign refers not to an 'outside' world but an 'inside' world.

Admittedly, this third translational activity is difficult to comprehend in itself—it would seem that the entirety of Husserl's phenomenological system is an attempt to internalize a Nietzschean *amor fati* such that the transcendental subject inhabits a world entirely of their own making, where they may look in any direction and not only see all that they must affirm, but that this subject has reclaimed (reappropriated) control; the 'world' has become theirs (Husserl 18-21). Preceding this, though, Derrida finds small hints—traces—as to Husserl's acquiescence to the structuring of a 'transcendental' subject that are decidedly exterior to them; where there is no control over the 'moment,' of the 'blink of an eye,' the impression that it leaves, the sign supposed to designate it. Thus to understand the final shift from indication to meaning (as expression) is to invoke that entire system in the crossing inaugurated by Husserl's *epoché* as the act of making-transcendental the subject of phenomenology by bracketing all that they are not—the world as fundamentally exterior—in order to retrieve that world as 'for me' (op cit.); something that seemingly can no longer happen, has become unconditioned by his admission of processes beyond the transcendental subject *per se*.

For the world as an epochal 'for me' structure from the standpoint of transcendental phenomenology to work, for that subject to remain properly transcendental, not only does the world need to undergo this reappropriative process, but the signs which designate the world—which perform the double task of signifying the world and (as we've already noted in Schleiermacher) providing the structure for thought itself—in their exteriority must be suppressed for the sake of an interiorizing appropriation. However, instead, Derrida expounds on language as a form of *originary prosthesis*, a sort of primordial and 'natural' *techné* which ultimately exteriorizes the subject, rather than interiorizing their language. In *Of Hospitality* he notes that, "Language resists all mobilities because it moves about with me. It is the least immovable thing, the most mobile of personal bodies, which remains the stable but portable condition of all mobilities: in order to use the fax or the "cellular" phone, I have to be carrying on me, with me, in me, as me, the most mobile of telephones, called a language, a mouth, and an ear, which makes it possible to hear yourself-speaking" (91). Language is the *techné* that I hold within me. But further, "What we are describing here, which is not the same as endorsing it, is the most unbreakable of fantasies. For that which doesn't leave me in this way, language, is also, in reality, in necessity, beyond the fantasy, that which never ceases to depart from me. Language only works *from* me" (ibid, italics in original). Derrida treads the ground that will be central in *Monolingualism of the Other*, "I only have one language; it is mine" (1). So, too, to allow to stand on its own 'internally' the movement from indication to expression, from the designation of the sign for an external referent to its reappropriative internalization, *betrays* a translational activity that in fact exteriorizes the subject rather than interiorizing the language.

Two Controversies of Translation: *The Non-Neutral Problem*

Having said this, we must be aware of the great risk, the fact of an exposure and a vulnerability inhering within the structure of language as prosthesis, one which opens the fundamental phenomenon—and enduring possibility—of translatability, whilst also compelling the desire to assert untranslatability. The presumption of untranslatability marks the boundary of a sacred or undeconstructible object, its delineation being the basis upon which the object emerges.[16] The assertion of an incapacity grounds not a sphere of 'truth,' but instead, the sphere of a *decision upon the possibility or impossibility of truth* as the *speaking of an idiom and from within the sheltered space of that idiom*. Here we might quote Heidegger, "language is the house of Being" (217). The presumption of untranslatability operates as a repeatable assertion—iterable in any idiom *as such*—authorizing the distinction of the national idiom, its inherent uniqueness, its impossibility

to be appropriated, forged, or duplicated, *as if* asserted on the plane of truth exclusive to one national idiom over others. The assertion adds itself to the 'object' at the moment of a translation (from the 'moment' to indication, from indication to expression), and thus it constructs in order to maintain the authorial boundary of that object, to keep it safe, to place it in reserve, to hold it inside. This is to say, the statement rendered in this way—"this sentence cannot be translated," "this text must be read in the original in order for it to remain meaningful"—operate declaratively as observations of fact, and descriptively as assertive positions. Their *duplicity* is that such a statement is wrought in both registers; an assertion hiding behind the statement of a fact. It is, we should say, a matter of decisiveness within a topography of *assertive* contest upon which one declares, even more so when one *declares the immutable uniqueness of the text, their text, whose appropriation is declared impossible at the moment of appropriation.*

Thus, the declaration of untranslatability hides an assertion. But the assertion betrays its declaration. No longer is the declaration rendered as being able to replace the fact, which would require no such declaration. Instead, its assertion, its utterance, the fact of its saying and needing to have been said opens the tenuous web beneath which there can be found no ground, but upon which the fabric of a subject-object relation, and the wider sphere of a structure of a linguistic idiom, take hold in the decision to assert, the decision to declare *as if* as a fact the untranslatability of the object, and by extension, the idiom itself—where not only this particular text, but the very words that comprise it are excluded—a relation that is exclusive through this protective assertion, which, in protecting the object through exclusion marks out the privileged place of a subject and a language which are also protected in their sacred separation from an Other. They remain 'pure' in and of themselves.

Let us presume that this *is* true, that an idiom—*my* idiom, that of *my* homeland, of *my* "Capital-City-Mother-Fatherland" (Derrida 42), which will always seem uneasily like the protections of a colonial project or its nationalist resistance—is untranslatable. In what language does it speak? What is the untranslatable idiom? We might conceive of two such responses. Either the untranslatable idiom is that which is held entirely in secret; or the untranslatable is that which cannot be uttered. Certainly, these possibilities are not mutually exclusive—the secret and the unutterable bearing the shared mark of that which cannot be said, and thus remains in silence. However, we might also attempt to describe these in some exterior way—for we are assured that it is already impossible to penetrate into their internal depths. A language held entirely in secret is, like the coding, the encryption, the cypher of a secret society, refuses to be uttered publicly, and thus is not made available for translation. It is withheld, but it exists. This sphere of linguistic possibility—the possibility of an impossible translation of a secret idiom—is also the place of child's play, of terms of endearment (often ones that circulate widely—'honey,' 'love,' 'baby'—but still bearing the weight of what is intended to be unique—'*my* love,' etc.), and of a great subterranean expanse of linguistic activity in which the abstract and impersonal form of language is affixed with the personal in the act of communication. One could not understand within the idiom the meaning affixed to such a term—'my love'—when issued *from me.* Partaking in a shared idiom confronts the personal demand to refuse to share, to reject equitable distribution of language, and thus to hold in reserve, to maintain a vigilant silence. This either contributes to or opposes what would otherwise be a public economy of signs held only internally by the public assertion of the boundary of the national idiom—where 'mine' is translated as 'ours.' *My/our language is untranslatable to you, fellow-stranger of the idiom I/we speak.*

The rather recent history of translation studies (TS) and its sociological method of inquiry has been constrained by the axiomatic assertion that what takes place in translation is the movement between already well-established and nationally defined idioms, even

when the very notion of translation as a central—and competing—tenet invokes the idea that a language is transformed under the auspices of the translator and in view of the work in translation. This was certainly a key insight offered by Walter Benjamin on *good* translation (that is, the 'highest praise' that can be attributed to a translation, the mark of its value, is its conditioning of such a radical change). He notes:

> The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue. Particularly when translating from a language very remote from his own he must go back to the primal elements of language itself and penetrate to the point where work, image, and tone converge. He must expand and deepen his language by means of the foreign language. It is not generally realized to what extent this is possible, to what extent any language can be transformed, how language differs from language almost the way dialect differs from dialect; however, this last is true only if one takes language seriously enough, not if one takes it lightly. (81)

So, too, Benjamin remarks that a *good* original is one that lends itself to translatability:

> The extent to which a translation manages to be in keeping with the nature of this mode is determined objectively by the translatability of the original. The lower the quality and distinction of its language, the larger the extent to which is information, the less fertile a field is it for translation, until the utter preponderance of content, far from being the lever for a translation of distinctive mode, renders it impossible. The higher the level of a work, the more does it remain translatable even if its meaning is touched upon only fleetingly. (ibid.)

Between these two poles—between the original and the translated work—there seems to be the possibility to re-ascribe the mutability of languages as an apparent fact, one that we should not allow to escape from our notice even when attempting to define—and thus to fix—these two poles.

Nevertheless, an enduring trend in translation studies occludes these transformations entirely for the reappropriative mode we have critically explored above. Lefevere (1992) captures incisively in numerous fragments the foundational work that study of translation seems to engage in through 'naturalizing' languages. Here, he presents under the heading of 'ideology' an entirely separate problematic from that which we've referred to above—not between the nationalist and the cosmopolitan, but between two embedded and implicit national 'uses' of translation:

> Translators, in Horace's understanding, thrive on the trust their patron and their public put in them. They do not have to translate "word for word" because both patron and audience literally "take their word" at face value. Victor Hugo describes the other extreme: "When you offer a translation to a nation, that nation will almost always look on the translation as an act of violence against itself." Translations can be potentially threatening precisely because they confront the receiving culture with another, different way of looking at life and society, away that can be seen as potentially subversive, and must therefore be kept out. (14)

Here, Lefevere finds evidence for what Maurice Blanchot will explore in a short essay, stating, "Translating, I would remind the reader, was, for a long time, regarded as a baneful pretension in certain regions of culture. Some do not want anyone to translate into their language, and others do not want anyone to translate their language; and war is needed in order for this treachery, in the literal sense, to be carried out: to hand over the true language of a people to a foreign land" (57).

Sergey Tyulenev offers a model for critically engaging the sociologist of culture who must—in speaking plainly, particularly to students—present the object of their research as if as a substantive national object.[17] After outlining the sedimenting methods of situating 'culture' in English speaking Enlightenment discourses—from the 'individual,' to a 'collective' to a 'nation'—he remarks that, "National cultures were often referred to as 'spirit (Geist or

ésprit) of a nation…" (*Translation and Society* 21). We might consider Tyulenev's own definition of culture, which offers much to consider in light of the issue of translation:

> As is the case with the term 'society,' the application of the term 'culture' varies in terms of scale… Human culture is determined by three types of adaptations ensuring the survival of the human race. Culture needs to adapt to: the external environment requiring protection from hostile natural forces and other human groups' offensive actions; human bio-social and psychic nature, which requires physical and social contact with other human beings, the need for status and self-respect, leisure and recreation, mutual care, etc.; collective living (which follows from human bio-psycho-social needs), which requires going beyond individual needs and implies the need to coexist with other human beings, avoiding both chaos and excessive domination. (ibid. 20)

Culture is a particular manner in which a human being (a general category) takes on— and exceeds—the immediate biological needs they are confronted with. He continues:

> In a narrower sense, the term 'culture' means behavioural patterns acquired through socialisation into a particular human collectivity. In this sense the term is usually applied to large groups extended in space and time, usually in modern societies associated with nations or nation-states, that is, nations as geographical and political units or to peoples within such units (Hungarian, English, Buryat, Flemish cultures). In this sense, we can speak of a culture or cultures and, what is especially important for TIS [Translation and Interpreting Studies], cultures have their own languages and require interlingual translation in order to interact one with another across space and time. Finally, small groups occupying much more modest territories during a short period can also be described as having their distinct cultures (the culture of the Moscow intelligentsia of the post-Stalinist Thaw). What are called in sociology 'subcultures' also belong to this group. (ibid. 23)

Tyulenev is not shy of a language that will help, even for the time being, fix his object— not only 'culture' but 'cultures,' a plethora of undesignated cultural communities. As a result, he offers a similar translator–subject oriented and decidedly nationalist definition of translation: "Even if the translator translates on his/her initiative, s/he represents some social system, into which s/he is socialized and to whose communication in the form of traditions, logic, culture, etc., his/her translational decision and behavior can be traced" (*Applying Luhmann to Translation Studies* 148).

   Where Tyulenev's sociology of culture seemingly *must* give credence to its research 'object' as a substantive 'thing,' and thus also to—only descriptively, never declaratively— valorize the unit of the 'nation,' his oft-cited antecedent, Wilhelm von Humboldt, provides for us an overt formulation of a nationalist project of translation. In his famous introduction to a translation of *Agamemnon*, he states, "I have tried to guard against un-Germanness and obscurity. But in the latter respect one should not make unjust requirements that might preclude gaining other higher assets" (58). This assertion, however, is the culmination of two competing desires that, for von Humboldt, are at the root of the question—the desire, the danger—of translation. On the one hand, he begins his introduction by noting that, "…no word in one language is completely equivalent to a world in another, if one disregards those expressions that designate purely physical objects" (55). We might be scintillated to follow the question of what constitutes the 'purely physical object,' how an 'expression' may be rendered in such terms; wouldn't any idiomatic expression— "under the weather," "call it a day," "hit the sack," "speak of the devil"—bind an 'object' (a subject of predication and/or an exterior state of being) with an idiomatic function that is supposed to exceed it (where being "under the weather" *does* invoke an object and a predicate, while metaphorically referencing bad weather to illustrate that they have taken ill)?[18] Instead, we might ask what is *not* an impure object, given our analysis above.

On the other hand, von Humboldt seems to find a (nationalist-imperialist) demand for translation specifically into German, and specifically against French. Speaking to the need for a translation to "feel foreign" (Fremde), he notes, "How else has it happened that none of the spirit of the ancients has been assimilated by the French as a nation? Even though all of the major Greeks and Romans have been translated into the French language, and some have even been translated into the French style quite well, neither the spirit of antiquity nor even an understanding of that spirit has permeated the French nation (we are not speaking here of individual scholars)" (58). This, of course, he juxtaposes with the German spirit of translation (the quotation on 'un-Germanness' being the statement that directly follows). He makes a further claim, saying, "For it is the wonderful characteristic of languages that, first and foremost, each one accommodates the general needs of everyday life; yet, through the spirit of the nation that shapes and forms it, a language can be infinitely enriched," (56), only to add further that, "To the same extent that a language is enriched, a nation is also enriched. Think how the German language, to cite only one example [as if at random], has profited since it began imitating Greek matter" (57). It would perhaps not be enough just to note the overtly economic discourse of enrichment which permeates these statements, and binds the nationalist with the imperial desire to translate. However, as it seems, there remains always the possibility for this economy to emerge within the discipline if not carefully approached.

Even the earliest tentative gestures toward a sort of internationalism remain too within the mode of reifying the 'nation' itself. We witness also, the metonymic slippage wherein the political unit of the 'nation' is supplemented for the fundamental unit of the 'individual,' and where the 'nation' is treated as a 'one.' In Lefevere's collection we find a short fragment from Goethe within which he states, "A truly general tolerance will most certainly be reached if we respect the particular characteristics of single individuals and nations. We should, however, keep in mind that what has real merit distinguishes itself in that it belongs to humanity as a whole, and translate accordingly" (24). Here, the 'singularity' of individuals is extended to a concomitant 'singularity' of nations; both might be treated as 'units.' This is so, even when clearly Goethe's declared statement, that which we should—and do—hold in clearer view, is intended to counter these 'units' with another: "humanity as a whole."[19] So, too, we find in Tyulenev (*Translation and Society*) an attempt to bind a notion of 'interculture' with the biological language of 'symbiosis' such that distinct biological entities might merely be brought together—not necessarily entangled, but as two distinctly categorical and nominal entities merely in contact.

Conclusion: Taking Sides

We might coin a term, *disapparition*, to capture how specific focus on the linguistic object in the context of a national idiom is liable to find it 'bobbing' in and out of existence, how it appears one moment and disappears the next, much like a ghost or phantom. Further, we might draw into our discussion a constellation of *ephemera* which seem to abide by the same conditions—of dreams, mirages, madness and death—which become apparent to us and, at once, dissolve into nothing, which were perhaps only half real to begin with. However, extending beyond ourselves for a moment, attempting to reach perhaps beyond what we can grasp, *disapparition* is a *problem of translation*, one which ultimately threatens the internal structure of this house of the nation.

As Emily Apter reminds us, we cannot overlook the many problems posed by the uncritical acceptance of a term like 'world literature' in relation to translation, to a dogmatic acceptance of notions of 'cosmopolitanism' and 'globalization' which remain problems to be explored. In fact, it would be possible to forge an entirely different line of inquiry which places the question of (un)translatability in proximity to the relation the seemingly

antipodal nationalist vs. cosmopolitan contention perhaps too easily erects. For example, we could contend with how there remains consistently an imperialist project within the nationalist chauvinisms of a certain kind of approach to translation, one best demonstrated again by von Humboldt. The question of 'spirit' has eluded us only somewhat here—bearing resonances to a protean modernist nationalism von Humboldt wishes to use to fix the linguistic realm in place as much as to a religious Christian globalization that Derrida has already cautioned against ("Faith and Reason").

And certainly, developing this line of inquiry, there would be no need to attempt—when perhaps such scholarship cannot be done rigorously, when such a division could not hold—to separate the nationalist impulse from the imperialist in translation studies. Certainly, Friedrich Nietzsche already remarked of his predecessors in a German idiom that a history of translation drawing primarily from ancient Rome would have to contend with how, "In those days, indeed, to translate meant to conquer—not merely in the sense that one would omit the historical dimension but also in the sense that one would add a hint of contemporaneousness to the material translated and, above all, in the sense that one would delete the name of a poet and insert the translator's name in its place" (69). Perhaps too well-said for ourselves to offer our own paraphrase, he continues, "and all this was done with the very best conscience as a member of the Roman Empire, without realizing that such actions constituted theft" (ibid.).

As mentioned at the outset, it would seem that one must take sides in and for translation. Apter's work on translation, her contention with the hazard of an *a priori* presumption of a plural discourse of world literature without a practice, where there remains a need for vigilance over a world literature already in translation, and one that maintains difference, also bears the acute sense of Derrida's that an uncritical interpretation of the notion of cosmopolitanism as the homogenization of a world of translation into an Anglo-American hegemony, rather than one that gestures toward a more fruitful planetary cosmopolitic. We remain vigilant also against the open possibility of translation being threatened by a primordial foreclosure, where a *neither/nor* of national and world literatures operates asymmetrically on the (im)possibility of translation, particularly where the already-political act of asserting untranslatability is grounded in the structure of an authority that bears the capacity to do so—untranslatability is not asserted in/for *any* idiom and not all languages are afforded the same protections. In fact, we must remember: *a homogenizing 'globalized' world is already a world divided into nation-state units*, the world we live in.

Nevertheless, the thrust of our problematic remains also the enduring impossible hope for a project in outline of the problematic and the possibility of translatability itself, its implications cutting across language(s), posing problems to a structure of establishment for language which, although posed in light of a horror of crisis—an impending ruination, a disaster of having offered the object, the subject, the text, the idiom for sacrifice to be erased—is just as much an opening upon an *elsewhere*. The allowance of translation maintains the possibility of this opening, even if translation is a fruitless and ruinous venture, even if it invites the so-called 'enemy-other' into one's midst. Taken together, it would seem that the relation between language—*a* language—and translation is reversed. Translation precedes language in the fact of its deconstructibility. For a language to exist, it must already undergo a 'primordial' or 'originary' act of translation—not merely between national-units and their separable languages, but in general.

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Notes

[1] I have taken my cues primarily from Emily Apter's "Philosophical Translation and Untranslatability" to outline some of these general fields; a wonderfully accessible entry-point into the problematic at hand.

[2] Derrida, in "Faith and Reason," does not deal directly with the question of translation, and so it would not be surprising to overlook the connection. Nevertheless, he does outline a method of analysis of the phenomenon of globalization having given rise to the issue of monolingual vs translational politics within a global system—where an overarching Anglo-American idiom is part of an imperial project of linguistic-territorial expansion—in contention with the tendency to articulate a nation-statist notion of community.

[3] See for example, Apter's preface to Cassin's *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, as well as her incisive identification of Abdelfattah Kilito's *Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language*, that, "Kilito's bid for monolingualism risks sounding anticomparatist or, at worst, xenophobic, but it seems directed at safeguarding the sacred language, particularly as the sacred resides in the singularity of poetry." ("Philosophical Translation and Untranslatability" 57–58).

[4] See: Derrida's *Eyes of the University* and "Interpretations at War"; Apter's *Against World Literature*.

[5] Unfortunately, the seminars Jacques Derrida conducted under the unofficial title of "philosophical nationalities and nationalism" between 1984 and 1989 bore no typescript—and thus, no translation is likely to be forthcoming—although the culminating year would comprise the material for *The Politics of Friendship*. See also: Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas' preface to Derrida's *For Strasbourg*.

[6] See: Derrida's "Faith and Knowledge, *Eyes of the University* and *Sovereignties in Question.*

[7] See: Billig's *Banal Nationalism*; see also: Lefevere's introduction on ideology in translation (14).

[8] See: Rée (240–51).

[9] In this way, the place of literature has only ever been apprehensively positioned in relation to conceptions of 'national literatures,' pulled on another side by what Goethe—and so many after him—conceived of as 'world literature(s).' See: Damrosch; Derrida's *Monolingualism* and "Who or What is Compared?"; Amoui.

[10] See: Apter's *Against World Literature*.

[11] See: Derrida's "Globalization, Peace and Cosmopolitanism." For a discussion of 'planetarity, see: Spivak's *Death of a Discipline*. For a key text on 'cosmopolitics,' see: Cheah and Robbins eds.

[12] See: Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.

[13] Reference to Schleiermacher, Nietzsche and von Humboldt are derived from Schulte and Biguenet's *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*.

[14] This bears the mark of the *phonic* privilege of the 'voice that hears itself speak' mentioned in both *Voice and Phenomenon* and *Of Grammatology*, the latter of which grounding a discussion of Western logocentrism (3–5).

[15] The parallels between these levels outlined by Schleiermacher—inter-linguistic subjects, intra-linguistic subjects, a single subject 'themselves—and the Kantian transcendental subject have not been lost on us. The 'mode' of the lecture, in which an exploration of a single character making their way through a great many questions of translation, would seem to invoke his well-established indebtedness to his predecessor here, Immanuel Kant's method of critique as much as to the transcendental subject. Schleiermacher's contribution, much like Fichte's, is to foreground the question of language absent from Kant's *oeuvre*; still so, Schleiermacher's return ("on the other hand…") to the Kantian subject retains the debt.

[16] See: Fredrik Barth's pivotal work on ethnicity as "boundary maintenance." See also Eriksen; Eriksen and Jakoubek.

[17] Again, see Wimmer and Glick-Schiller for an incisive critique of what they call 'methodological nationalism' particularly in anthropology and sociology.

[18] Instead, I submit the insight of Walter Benjamin, who mentions that, "The words *Brot* and *pain* "intend" the same object, but the modes of this intention are not the same. It is owing to these modes that the word Brot means something different to a German than the word pain to a Frenchman, that these words are not interchangeable for them, that, in fact, they strive to exclude each other. As to the intended object, however, the two words mean the very same thing" (74).

[19] This is, of course, where the assertion of untranslatability might now be located, as what Apter subversively retrieves from Harold Bloom as "saving difference," wherein the notion of difference is used to counteract the hegemonic appropriation implicit in the imperial act of authorizing translatability particularly by a hegemonic culture against its 'others' (Apter, "Against World Literature"; see also Cassin's *Dictionary*; Johnson on difference; Spivak, "The Politics of Translation" on forms of resistance to the imperialism of translatability).

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Silence as Noise: The Resistance of Translation; Translation as Resistance

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Abstract: This contribution brings together Jacques Derrida's *The Post Card*, Jean-Luc Nancy's *Being Singular Plural*, Wayne Koestenbaum's fables, and Édouard Glissant's *Treatise on the Whole-World* to conceptualize a framework for translation informed by media studies, deconstruction, queer theory, and performance studies. Through reading my own "undeliverable" correspondences with noted translator Mary Ann Caws, I consider how the epistolary affect of contemporary virtual interactions requires closer attention to the staging of coincidence and copresence, voyeurism and intimacy, but also to the lapses that allow passing—the detours and détournements of transmission. In continuing to probe the efficacy of translation as a mode that exceeds the parameters of the territorial and the individual, I revisit my earlier theorizations of the "migratory text" as a work that is born in translation to consider how the untranslatable begets translation as a point of disconnective contact; how translation can serve as its own resistance.

Keywords: Digital intimacy, epistolary, media studies, migratory text, translation studies

"I write you": On Ciphers, Acronyms, Anonymous Non-Encounters

MAC writes me messages I don't receive. I get them hours later, days later, or I don't get them at all. And so I have to imagine all the messages meant for me. I have to imagine all the intention in the world, everything I'll never encounter but which touches me, still, in spite or maybe exactly because of this non-encounter, an error or accident that actualizes my own desire to feel and be felt without knowing it, without being conscious of the feeling or the attempt to record it, or reproduce it, or (especially), to understand it. And I can imagine MAC, which means I can picture her but also put myself there, I can place myself in her position, I can become MAC-in-the-act-of-sending what will never be sent, despite so much virtual purpose and the physicality of typing; MAC's discerning fingers darting across the alphabet, a keyboard which becomes a keycode, a cipher that can't or isn't meant to be decoded; something that exists only to remain, attended and unintentional, not to be penetrated, not to be broken down and deconstructed, not to be solved or resolved, worked and worked out; not to be *cracked*, as the popular expression goes.

Jacques Derrida (1987) likes the post card because of its ability to banalize the cipher through reproduction. Writing, too, can inoculate the experience it wishes to harness, allowing the forgery to displace an original, the "single 'true' letter" (Derrida 1987, 11) of Derrida's beloved missive. "What I like about post cards," Derrida elaborates, "is that even if in an envelope, they are made to circulate like an open but illegible letter" (1987, 12). MAC, who will remain MAC for the duration of this composition, becomes legible here only because I have privileged the acronymatic character of anonymity—the *acr-* which marks, above all and below, both beginning and end, an edge or tip for naming—and the charge of innominate encounters, reducing her to her initials so she can initialize Derrida's own dream of a ciphered language,[1] a communion in crossed correspondence between

herself and me, between me and her: not text, nor picture, neither caption nor address, but a backlit screen showing nothing but its backlogged brilliance: a message reflecting only its sender's visage, partially obscured in the glare of the midday sun in spring (it's April here). In this way, it becomes possible—ecstatically—to send ourselves back to ourselves.

This essay is an attempt to put translation in play; to play translation through its affinity for infidelity. Every message is encoded with such noise, as Claude Shannon (1948), founder of information theory, understood when he formulated his five-step sequence for communication. And what's more: information is not only interrupted by noise, but dependent upon it for transmission. Whereas Shannon's framework allows us to examine the function and role of noise as an external variable intrinsic to the operation of delivery, we should remember that noise does not necessarily arrive from the outside but from the message itself. Entropy, here, serves as latent awareness (process) *and* precondition of delivery (production): the moment when content marks the disintegration of form, unless it's the other way around. Closer attention to the inherent instability of correspondence can remind us: what is untranslatable is not the same as what is resistant to translation. In that resistance—to fidelity, to equivalence, to cultural homogenization and dominance— what is brought to light is a framework for translation that is transparent, not, as Walter Benjamin (1968) desired, to escort an authentic original but in fact to perform as a collaborative act that opens up the processes of its own mediation, relating its passage through borders both national and linguistic, psychic and material. The task of translation thus becomes *mobility*, where mobility is the remaking of space through our positions within it. What is remade, what is undertaken, what is confronted through this interaction is not just the code—the text, the lingual script—but the source itself: as sovereign, as natural and naturalizing, as pure and absolute.

Towards Copies Without Originals: Working Notes

1. Whenever I read my notes back, I don't retrieve events so much as try to reconstruct them by adding other annotations, backdated: an attention to interval.

2. The evaporation of "the message" upon delivery is a game of glances, I think, a negotiation between appearance and disappearance, which I've often felt to be the necessary condition of language, or maybe composition. To detour, to distract or digress, and then—with no indication or authorization—to return my glance to the subject, and the reader, while the latter isn't looking.

In her essay on "Dead Flesh, or the Smell of Painting," Mieke Bal (1994) posits the representation of death as the aporia of representation—its limitations, the impossibility of representation as a form of unfurnished immediacy. But don't all experiences of knowledge and sensation arrive indirectly or not at all? Decades earlier, Walker Percy (1958), in "Metaphor as Mistake," makes the point that in order to be ascertained, a thing first needs to be adulterated through the symbolization of metaphor, the mistake of metaphor which is really *the metaphor as a mistake*. The kind of translations I have pursued, I am still pursuing, might not be called "translations" at all but originals born in translation, what I have elsewhere theorized as a *migratory text* (2019; 2021): a corpus characterized by its attention to collaboration, polyphony, archive, and abstraction.

3. Attracted to mimesis as a textual behavior. Attracted to a mode of inquiry that would allow us to exploit the constitutive limits of the archive through recital, enumeration, resemblance, which is never not ever exactly a doubling. This task would beg the indulgence of a critical reader (a critical reading?), a love of looking failure in the face. I want to say that the limit can also be the edge, a necessary precipice, the threshold from which *something other than the historical past* ghosts the history of our present.

4. It is not just that memory has no chronology but that chronology has no memory; this is why everything that is written here must first be recorded, re-transcribed, confronted with its own discrepancies.

5. Remember: Every act of sending (correspondence) relates nothing if not instability (intrinsic to the operation). Is it or isn't it the same of semiosis, which relies not on reading but on misreading?

6. What's the difference between giving and sending, sending and transfer, transfer and transmission?

7. Notion of the intercepted postcard. Remember to put ʟ *before* ᴋ.

Wayne Koestenbaum (2020), in "The Task of the Translator," writes that originals are respected only if they pass through translation's veils. Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida, Homi Bhabha, a long line of thinkers, ordered chronologically, tend to the same vision—the indebtedness of the original to its translations—from variant outlooks: translation as after-life; as survival; as genesis, the literal marks of a hybrid resistance. But is it or isn't it true that translation wants to subvert such fixed sequences, and their progression? Old and young, past and future, heritage and homelessness, origin and trace, original and copy. What translation says is *in every system there is a kink*. And any kink implies a crack, or better, fold—a twist—in every absolute authority. Another way of saying this is when we double the sequence—recorded, copied *out*—the outcome is no longer fixed, but undone.

8. Want to reach a point where every debt returns as a gift. Want to reach a point where transcription exceeds voice.

9. For example, when I read a copy of this text—excerpted, with several omissions (publication data, page numbers, and even its author all missing)—I read it as if I have just now encountered it. Actuality or authenticity is replaced with transmediated immediacy; sentences I am well-acquainted with *look* new, and in their g(l)aze I am shown (back to) myself with the understanding that if everything born is born illegal, birth puts into question not the subject, but the law. It is not fidelity but forgetting that presents itself as the necessary condition of translation.

10. Want to reach a point where speaker is confused with listener, where sender returns as receiver. Erase all differences between the transcription of event and the event of transcription, or exploit them, through withdrawing.

Just as Derrida (2000) recognized, in his seminar discussion on hospitality, that in order to safeguard a letter, he'd have to extend its distance from his body—through securing it elsewhere—it becomes necessary in the act of correspondence, the act of translation, to manufacture distance so as to materialize a fundamental intimacy. Elsewhere, Alan Bass writes in his own translator's introduction to Derrida's *The Post Card*: "What we call a text always implies supplementary, unpayable debts" (1987, x). But these debts are not burdens; such absences in the text are in fact spectral presences: invitations to read between the lines and across the margins.

Wayne Koestenbaum's "The Task of the Translator," which is not a re-reading of Walter Benjamin's oft-exercised original so much as a re-writing of the German Jewish philosopher's critical essay into something that more closely mimes fable-cum-autotheory, advances through attraction: the bizarre love triangle between a writer (Daisy), a translator (Gavin), and the instructor (Wayne) who teaches the writer's work in translation. War and desire—variously intimated, encountered, and undertaken throughout the text's fifteen pages—serve as the story's backdrop while informing the stakes of its subject: translation's imperial leanings, fraught with privileges and power relations that often go unexamined; as well as the charge of translation's productive promiscuity, what I earlier called its inherent

infidelity. *Delivery*, in this reading, serves neither exactitude nor equivalence but incompletion and imperfection; translation, indeed, is a mode that tends to the sketchy, the tentative, the rough and unfulfilled—meaning that is found, and found *wanting*.

High on the allure of translation—or perhaps, rather, the cultural capital of the commodified original as it circulates, accreting value at each waypoint—Wayne begins teaching the originals-in-translation before they've even been translated. Earlier, Wayne's insistence for processual documentation—and for documenting the process of language's mediation, converting it into knowledge and scholarship—suggests a framework for inverting not only normative models of translation but moreover, the act of artistic production and the very concept of what constitutes a finite (or finished) work of art, the text proper. If it's true, as Benjamin has considered (himself in translation, most commonly read in the English through Harry Zohn), that "all great texts contain their potential translation between the lines" (Benjamin 1968, 82), then it's Wayne, who, as resident artist-teacher, operates "midway between poetry and doctrine" (Benjamin 1968, 77), Benjamin's own analogy, after Mallarmé, of translation itself. Wayne, as go-between, as advocate and agitator, conducts the friction necessary to generate translation as an event, open-ended and extant: *permitting or designed to permit spontaneous and unguided responses.*

"Gavin was taking notes for a future translation of Daisy's in-class breakdown on the second evening of the war," Koestenbaum writes. "Wayne was trying to teach Gavin's future notes, even before they were written down or translated, and this precipitousness, this earliness, was posing problems, complications to be discussed between teacher and translator, later, at the Y, in Gavin's room, after Daisy had returned to the Waldorf" (2020, 159). It is no coincidence that this scene should end—must end—at the local Y: public, temporary, susceptible to rest but also recreation; the rendezvous as vague, as variable, amidst steam-curdled stalls separating bare bodies, or providing each a short-lived space of refuge, a spare moment of fugitivity. Can you return to a place you've never been? Concept project for a future memory. Another way of asking this question is asking ourselves: *where am I in the stories I read, or watch, or listen to?* To locate the agency of translation for its capacity to both converge and dislocate is to locate our own subject position as readers within the porous landscape of the text. No longer witnesses, nor those who are invited to testify on behalf of the text, as I've written elsewhere,[2] readers, here, converge as accomplices. All texts, of course, do not end in publication but only ever begin there, shedding the funereal polish of completion as they begin to interact and expose themselves to manifold partners.

The epistolary affect of our virtual encounters across the screen informs a version of intimacy and authorship that relies on attachment *and* dispersal, the serendipitous or systematized encounters that emerge in-between bodies, not all of which are human. If Koestenbaum's "The Task of the Translator" can be read as a re-writing of Benjamin's essay of the same name, it is also a translation, ferrying Benjamin's embryonic pure language into the arena of the everyday. Voyeurism as reproduction operates as leitmotif; multimodal renderings enact and scatter across the story's pages; Koestenbaum limns transmediation—as Wayne continues to film the daily conversations between Daisy and Gavin; as Georgie, a seminar student, collects "exploitative footage" of Daisy crying for a video documentary about Gavin; as Daisy and Gavin film each other, nude-wrestling in the mud—as potentially precarious, but not without reward. Indeed, in Koestenbaum's re-telling, the dialectic of original-copy is reversed, reversible: in its afterlife, it is not only the original but the copy, too, which undergoes changes, accumulating allure precisely because of its imprecise qualities, its harboring of "uncapturable trace;" the danger of translation, as evidenced by the fable's final sequence, is not the possibility of its shrouding the original[3] but that the original will return to ghost its own present rendering, draping its material (body), as Daisy does, over an inert imitation.

Yet what is being enacted here is not replacement, nor annihilation, but a mode of silence that can be best described as the noise of translation—what refuses to be interpreted, let alone circulated or produced as knowledge, codified as scholarship. Likewise, the story's dramatic finale, where, after his Oscars acceptance speech, Gavin shoots himself, and Daisy, climbing on stage, drapes her body over her translator's, should be understood, not as a warning but as an invitation. It is only when Daisy and Gavin become "singularly plural" and "plurally singular," as Jean-Luc Nancy (2000) has written—to be together in difference as a mode of address *and* a way of thinking—that translation can finally make good on its promises of phatic exchange and relation. Nancy's attempts to reorient community, to reorient the social and the individual by releasing each from the "indeterminate multiplication of centripetal meanings, meanings closed in on themselves and supersaturated with significance" (2000, xiii) inform translation as an ethos and a praxis, in which the refusal to begin with absolute opposition (the division between self and other) and its enclosure paves the way for a thinking and a feeling that is shared, meaning that can only ever be on behalf of and in the presence of another: mutual exposure.

Even more potent, however, are the moments in which "connection" falters; when connection falls short, to the extent that everything that passes between us performs as an operation of distension, a stretching out that interlaces differences even as it preserves singularities. True contact, Nancy insists, "is beyond fullness and emptiness, beyond connection and disconnection" (2000, 5). The process of translation, too, as a collaboration premised on coincidence and copresence, on imbrication and interaction, a togetherness that is kin to the anonymous, moves not by continuity, but contiguity, where touch is not nearly or never penetration but simply the failure to consume fully; to be in touch with another, to touch one another, is to acknowledge this shared separation, an unknowability (or better, untranslatability) and the urge for nearness, which is intimacy. The point is not to find one's self in another through the production of love or language and literature, but to *lose one's self*. This is why the untranslatable begets translation as a point of disconnective contact: an endeavor to record the sensation of each caress, the friction of touch which can also be the failure to render, the inability to convert, to assimilate all the way. This is why translation can be its own resistance. To resist the terms of translation in its most normative framework means to reconceptualize the role and function of the translator, which necessitates, of course, reimagining the work itself.

If there is indeed a parable smuggled through "The Task of the Translator," it is one about the breakdown of translation *on account of* the breakdown of the translator—as singular, as stable. I want to use Koestenbaum's story to continue probing the efficacy of translation—not as a form of cultural imperialism or the accumulation of literary resources through importation—but, on the contrary, as a mode that exceeds the parameters of the territorial and the individual. In the slippery encounter between writer, translator, and scholar, what power relations that cohere the literary-art market with the academy (and other institutions both cultural and political) are made visible?

> 11. All of the paintings referenced by Mieke Bal, in my version of her "Dead Flesh" (from an edited collection classified as a "conference proceeding") are omitted.

The question of untranslatability is a question of representation, a question of representability: translation as (the) impossible. Gayatri Spivak (2012) also understood the necessary impossibility that is both the conditions for and the consequences of translation. In her analogy of the infant's incessant grabbing (*begreifen*) on to things, which opens her essay "Translation as Culture," Spivak demonstrates the swerve of "crude coding," the "never-ending weaving" that constitutes translation and which, as an act of negotiation and encounter, muddles the border between "inside" and "outside" (2012, 241). Here, the body as both script and instrument of inscription reveals each representative domain,

each domain of representation, as equally available, equally vulnerable to both interference and exposure. In this giving, which is a reception, evasion and contact (the flux and innuendo of all intercourse, all forms of relation) should be read as a re-treating, a distancing that is not about the containment or security of an original or primary source but about edging as an ethical-erotic practice and ontology.

Consider another of Koestenbaum's fables, "The Sexual Translator," a story about a translator, Abel Mars, whose theory of synesthesia can only be passed on "in covert, perfumed practices" (Koestenbaum 2021, 142), practices that the fable's narrator can't or won't describe. Such a revelation can only transmit through sexual action, an aerobics (sinuous but unspecified) that undermines its actors' capacities to reason. Abel's task as a translator is "to uncover what the original author could not divine" (Koestenbaum 2021, 141); his theoretical framework of translation can only be uncovered between lines, or bodies, the point at which language stammers into ecstatic flight: murmurs that ask us only to feel and be felt, only to encounter without having to identify; to accept and enjoy that acknowledgement of unknowability (*blur* as mobility, as hospitality), a dissimulation or disassimilation that resists conversion into lexical knowledge yet insists to be shared. Translation can only be received—that is, rendered—through these second hands, relations which need not be visible to take effect, effects which ask to be imbibed without representation.

> 12. Unlike choosing which files to keep, a student writes me, and which files to discard on a flash drive, my brain automatically selects and saves what it wants to. The notebook lets you keep in touch with yourself, they write, not the you in the present but the you who was written down.

MAC, when she isn't writing to me, has written several books—translations, and cookbooks, and memoirs, and essay collections—among them: *The Eye in the Text*, whose library-cataloged copy sits on my nightstand, awaiting another checkout, or relishing, instead, the truth of its own delay: Oct 25, 2002, reads the most recent timestamp, etched in black ink that has bled into the page prior. In *The Eye of the Text*, MAC theorizes "architexture" as a methodology, probing how readers might attend to the passageway between the textual surface and its construction (or building process). This mobile event—an optical elusion—can only arise through the reader's contribution, their affinity for looking; "as if," MAC writes, "the eye could also turn inward, training its gaze upon that same parapet of the self this time not facing outward toward the object, but inside" (Caws 1981, 88). This exposure, which is *double or nothing*, is tuned to both the visual and the verbal, a poetics of perception that, as MAC writes, "insists upon the immediacy of the eye and upon an *intertexturality* of the visible and the audible and the understandable in their mobile interrelations" (Caws 1981, 11; italics in the original)—but moreover, I argue, what remains illegible, what evades acoustic orbits, what, in contradistinction, has to be imagined (as empathy, as an impossible ethics) to be seen.

> 13. What is the difference between passage and threshold, threshold and corridor? The book as a meeting place for generational drift.

> 14. Annotation as subject and method. Apotheosis of the text: when I can no longer distinguish my notes from the narrative. When the past is confused for its mediation. And I know it's done if it's incomplete.

> 15. Translation as relationship, not equivalence (or equation) … [translation as] a mutually transformative process built upon displacement, not denial: a radical reinvention of the source *as* the trace.

In order to transmit, to be transmitted, the original needs to be exposed, that is to say, it needs to be brought to light through a certain subjection, to be subjected to risk, action, chance, a disclosure that is also (and must be) abandonment. All modes of display rely on

this displacement. Or, as Édouard Glissant has articulated: "*Translation is like an art of flight, in other words, so eloquently, a renunciation that accomplishes*" (2020, 16; italics in the original). For Glissant, translation *as an approach*, is neither a distillation nor a hallucination—what is crucial is not any fetishized or fictitious essence to be mined or mimed but a "*frequenting the trace*" (Glissant 2020, 16; italics in the original), which can only happen through movement, through encounter and swerve, through looking, yes, but even and especially, through listening.

> 16. Remember: All resemblances benefit from a mistaken identity.

Among Glissant's aspirations throughout his *Traité du tout-monde*, translated into English in 2020 by Celia Britton, is to delink narrative and history, and more specifically, to devalorize the individual storyteller, to call into question their production of a narrative of history that serves as a literal pre-text for governance: the rule of history as the history of ruling powers, which must be written down in order to be turned into fact. Yet the intensification of simultaneity (as repetition) and repetition (as simultaneity) manufactured by the Internet, an experience likened, by Glissant, to an "explosion," undoes conventions of writing and divisions of literature. It is not writing, however, but reading that has undergone the most radical transformation, where *reading* means to be in flux, on the move, carried by the text but also bearing further instructions. Whereas Glissant acknowledges that, in the midst of this explosion, "we cannot keep hold of anything that would anchor us," instability and insecurity bear fruit: "must we also learn," he ultimately asks, "how to learn without holding onto anything?" (2020, 99)

Karl Marx (1937), imitating Friedrich Engels, with whom he was in constant correspondence, writes that every revolution is fixed, in the sense that each attempt at a new historical consciousness proceeds from an extant model: the gift of the past which is its catastrophe. No new revolutions, only new stage sets. Marx, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, wants to suggest that history, like language, can only be translated through assimilation. Translation, *in other words*, returns to the original if only to evacuate its contents.

> 17. When L comes before K, the text invites us to value arrangement as a primary form of information; to value the compilation of new arrangements from which to share experience as song.

> 18. *To view this image*, the white text reads, printed across each block of black, *please refer to the print version of this book.*

Return to Sender: The Inadvertent Gift of the Text

MAC writes me under the subject title "disappearing act of noncoincidences." The body is blank, empty, which I generally prefer. Because I like to fill the body myself, or think about filling it, not at this moment but momentarily, a filling that is still in-formation.

Underneath, a day later, while looking back at the noncoincidences, which have, through the length of space and duration, become plural, I notice more of her messages. Words that never reached me on account of my last name's common misspelling. The second *n* coming before the first *i* instead of after. When I write it this way, I can confuse myself; I can forget my own name, or form another in its place.[4]

> 19. What's the difference between silencing and gifting another person with sound? To name is also to say you are like and unlike the sonic quality of a specific combination of language.

I find these other messages; I come across them; I approach them as one approaches a clandestine meeting, the secret that conceals nothing, not even its desire to be shared.

MAC, however, had a desire to send these unsendable messages, retrospectively and post-facto, forwarded from her mail delivery subsystem, to share the error messages that become their own message subjects; a body that becomes a head, or heading: *I love that I never know if things Get To You! the myriad self you are …*

"A tragedy, my love, of destination" (Derrida 1987, 23), Derrida writes on June 6, 1977. But the tragedy is not the fact of a message's falter; the tragedy is the fact of a destination *in the first place*. And I like the idea of missed communications but even better, communications that remain missing. I like the idea of what's not received, what can never (not ever) be returned to sender, as if anything in this life can ever be returned, not really, not like that, not all the way, not ever. And isn't it better? To remain in debt, then, to every addressee, to every person with whom we've corresponded, which is to say to remain in debt to everyone who has ever gifted us with their presence, who has ever gifted us with their absence, who has ever looked for us in spite or maybe because of the disappearing act of noncoincidence. What can never be given or given back, what can only ever be forwarded, passed on, a potentiality that is imminent and always. We need only wait together.

MAC's messages, in this sense, are utopic, insofar as something at present is missing, in that such texts resist the totality of a discursive reading or the past tense of being read, becoming, not a means to an end but in fact interminable, distended, discontinuous, not unlike the act of itinerancy, the drift of people who move, not toward a finite arrival but in the pursuit of another exit. MAC's messages are utopic, too, insofar as they conjure the past—*I wonder if you got this?*—and the future—*Is this there?*—to critique the present; attesting to lack or absence or certain deficiency. Such texts, unreadable in their sites of origin, tend, instead, to the indefinite present, the present as defiant. Time, such haphazard transmissions remind us, is nothing if not a gift. Likewise, the failure to consummate communication allows one to prolong it, to extend it, to accumulate a meta-communication that doesn't merely talk around, or about, the original, but also re-enacts it. MAC and I speak about the unspeakable, and it is because of silence (error, failure) that we together produce noise, a delicate vibration to alert me that another message has arrived. Such is the unconditional hospitality of translation, in which originals are produced through copying out.

> Hi beloved Chris, I always get the wrong address except that with you it is always already and every time and where the right one …

Although hers is a cipher not meant to be decoded, MAC's messages to me make possible a transfer, an errantry built on errancy, a double movement that would not be possible otherwise; that would not be possible, paradoxically, if her original had transferred correctly. In being undeliverable, her message sends back to her; the message becomes also its own sender, text as author, as automatic and autonomic, secreting the additional code that constitutes the exile of nativity: *unknown address*. We might read the common error as the "carte of the adestination" (Derrida 1987, 29): the necessary combination of distancing and détour(nement) that begins by not beginning. Derrida prefers post cards because they fulfill for him a number of requirements which add up to the intimacy of voyeurism: the "absolute nonsecret" as a staging ground where the backdoor pleasure of a witness "to know, to testify, to attend" (Derrida 1987, 47) manifests in the portability of the post card, the teleportation of the post that is, above all, a solicitation, one that has passed from hand to hand, from ear to mouth, from tongue to lips.

If the border of the frame always involves a struggle for movement, or movement is always a struggle with the border of the frame, as media theorists such as Mieke Bal (2008) have asserted, then to be outside the frame means to be on the verge, to remain in flux, to attend to a horizon that one does not meet but that one can only picture; a

horizon that cannot be experienced directly but sensed only through *another*—the second-hand relation; the repetitive pretext for communication—*Has this reached you?*—that only comes after. Thus, MAC's messages permit a spatial and temporal straddle, decussating the space of the not here and the not not here but also the time of the not passed or the time that has gone unrecorded: a vertiginous epistle that dodges representation, preferring, instead, to document its own stochastic traversal. José Esteban Muñoz (1999) locates the political valence of failure as a *doing something else*: "that is, doing something else in relation to a something that is missing in straight time's always already flawed temporal mapping practice" (174). Failure, or what J.L. Austin (1979) called "infelicity" in his well-known framework for performative utterances, are in effect set up to foster alternative realities; the "certain disabilit[y]" that occurs whenever they fail "to come off" (237), a "misfire" (238) built on the discrepancy between intention and outcome. It is not that, in misfiring, nothing happens, as Shoshana Felman (2003) reminds us in *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, but that *something always happens*. Attending to the incidental, the inadvertent, the provisional and improvisational, harvests ingredients that make translation possible as a mode of incantation and swerve. And then again, and then again again—

To think of MAC thinking of me is to think not of a contemporary (and universalized) nowness but of nearness, begging the beginnings of a hypostasized me that is neither here and now nor then and there—a me that is endlessly deferred and enduringly intra-textual: the me that lives inside the text, but also and especially around it; MAC's sub-text which is also mine, the shared inter-text of correspondence, the secret infra-text of erratic disclosure. It is not where we are meant to be; it is where we are going.

> 20. And because I do not trust originals, I photograph my hand-written notes, and reproduce them here.

The Graduate Center/CUNY, USA

Notes

[1] As I write this, or read it back, I think of Walter Benjamin, again, and his desire for a pure, but also expressionless, language: language as encryption (coded, conveyed), where to *cover up* is also to *pile up*. See: Old Church Slavic *kryjǫ, krýti* "to cover, hide, shroud," and its correspondence with Lithuanian *kráuju, kráuti* "to pile up."

[2] "I like to think of the restructuring and resuturing of the body, so necessary to this operation; I like to think of the elasticity required to provide structure, to form connectivity, adaptability, or the adaptation of turning the reader into more than just a witness but one who also testifies, whose testimony becomes a part of the text; I like knowing that the principal path need be curved, detoured, and undeterred in its deviation." See: *A and B and Also Nothing* (Los Angeles: Otis Books | Seismicity Editions, 2020), 87.

[3] See Benjamin's specific prescriptions: "A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully." In Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 69–82.

[4] You will recall that Derrida likes post cards because of their essential reversibility, an elasticity that is somatic but also spatial: "one does not know what is in front or what is in back, here or there, near or far, the Plato or the Socrates, recto or verso" (Derrida 1987, 13). But still more significant is that these distinctions *no longer matter*: in that radical obscurity, passage—translation as correspondence, as mobility, as anonymous encounter, both ethical and erotic—bares itself.

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Translating Matricide: Orestes and Parashuram

TUHIN BHATTACHARJEE

Abstract: This paper examines an unexpected encounter, and the conversation that unfolds, between Orestes, the ancient Greek prince, and Parashuram, the ancient Indian sage. This dialogue, found in Sisir Kumar Das' Bengali collection *Aloukik Sanglap* (Unearthly Dialogues, 2011) contains a series of speculative conversations, in modern Bengali, between ancient Greek and ancient Hindu characters, forming a fascinating triangulation of cultures. But how does such a conversation become possible? What does such an impossible translation bring to light? This paper will analyze the dialogue titled *Dui Matrighati* ("Two matricides"), referring to Orestes' and Parashuram's crime of murdering their own mothers. Drawing on the works of thinkers like Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva, Emanuela Bianchi, and Iris Young, I will consider how ancient Greek and Hindu thinking about the maternal–feminine (fails to) translate into each other. I shall read this dialogue in the context of ancient representations of the mother, the law of the father in psychoanalysis, and the possibility of unpredictable friendships grounded on the untranslatable.

Keywords: Orestes, Parasurama, Mahabharata, matricide, female sexuality

For having avenged his father's murder by killing his own mother, the young prince Orestes is being pursued across the ancient Greek landscape by the enraged Furies, whose duty is to protect the sacred ties of kinship. Orestes has been running without rest for seven days straight, looking for a place to hide, his feet bleeding, when he bumps into a foreign traveler. The traveler offers Orestes shelter in his leaf hut and introduces himself as Parashuram, a young sage from India. In the conversation that gradually unfolds between two complete strangers, under the silent glow of this fortuitous gesture of hospitality, both discover shocking truths, unexpected affinities, and a shared fate. Parashuram eventually confesses that he too is guilty of matricide: he had killed his mother on the command of his father, who suspected her of having desired another man. "It was perhaps for meeting you that I had been waiting at this deserted mountain for I know not how many years," says Parashuram to Orestes. "I have been to many a pilgrimage, travelled many countries. I have seen numerous gods carved into idols. But for the first time today I see myself in you. You are not you, you are me, you are my mirror, you are my shadow. O prince, fate has sent you to me" (Das 47–48).[1]

This conversation is not from a lost Greek play, nor from an ancient Sanskrit text. It can be found in a Bengali book written by Sisir Kumar Das and published as recently as 2011. The book, aptly titled *Aloukik Sanglap* (Unearthly Dialogues), contains a series of speculative conversations, in modern Bengali, between ancient Greek and ancient Hindu characters, forming a fascinating triangulation of cultures. But how is such a conversation rendered possible? How do ancient Greek and Hindu thinking translate into each other? What happens when such thinking, already so distant from us, is translated to modern Bengali, and then again into English, as I am doing here? What is lost? What remains untranslatable? In this paper, I read the dialogue "Two Matricides" from Das's dialogues, referring to Orestes' and Parashuram's crime of killing their own mothers. As the two men pour their hearts out to each other, Orestes remains unflinching in his belief that he has committed no crime: avenging Agamemnon was his filial duty, even if it meant

murdering his own mother. While Parashuram agrees that he too was carrying out his duties as a son, his attitude is often more ambivalent and skeptical regarding their actions. He confronts Orestes on the inescapable cycle of revenge, asking whether revenge can ever be coterminous with justice, whether the logic of revenge does not then justify the wrath of the Furies, whether revenge is anything more than an uncritical adherence to tradition. Orestes, however, remains unconvinced, attributing Parashuram's guilt to a mind clouded by morality:

> Orestes: I just can't make sense of what you are saying, Parashuram. Your mind is being dictated by a strong sense of morality. You are so scared, so weak because the one you killed is your mother. Had you killed some other woman, you possibly wouldn't be so unsettled.
>
> Parashuram: Well said, Orestes. You too are being dictated by morality. It is the morality of the father. You want to avenge your father's death, hence your mother's death is of no consequence. My morality too is the father's. I have obeyed his order, hence mother's death hardly matters. The father and the mother. The seed and the field. To whom does the harvest owe more? (55)

Parashuram is here broaching a question that resonates across ancient and modern debates about the role of the woman in birth, in the origins of life as such. Ancient representations of women, in both Greece and India, frequently use the metaphors of seed and field, plough and furrow, to denote the difference between the sexes and their role in human reproduction. Ancient Sanskrit texts repeatedly mark sexual difference by using the metaphors of *Bīja* (seed) and *Ksetra* (field). Page DuBois has drawn attention to the ample evidence in Greek myth and literature for the analogy between the earth and the female body as sites of unbridled fecundity. Homer describes the earth as "much-nourishing," "grain-giving," "much-feeding," adjectives that emphasize the mother's creating and nurturing capacities. In the preagricultural economy of Homer's *Iliad*, the intercourse between Zeus and Hera results in the flowering of the earth (Book 14). With the shift to an agricultural economy based on property rights in classical times, the female body is increasingly seen as a furrow to be ploughed by the rightful husband. The ploughing imagery is most commonly used in reference to the plight of Oedipus, who had unwittingly impregnated his own mother. In *Seven Against Thebes*, Aeschylus describes him as "father-murdering Oedipus,/ who sowed his mother's sacred womb,/ whence he had sprung himself" (ll. 752-54). Tiresias, in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, calls him "a fellow sower (*homosporos*) in his father's bed" (ll. 459) and Oedipus describes his mother's womb as "this field of double sowing whence I sprang/ and where I sowed my children!" (ll. 1255-57).

   To whom, then, does the harvest owe more? To whom should Orestes and Parashuram be more obliged? In classical psychoanalytic discourse, the child's natural bond with the mother must be intercepted by the law of the father. The specter of the Oedipus complex, threatening the father with death and the child with neurosis, must be resolved so that the individual may smoothly transition into a socially functioning subject. The Oedipus complex is both the stumbling block and the stepping stone in this passage into civilization, an initiation rite that stabilizes and guarantees patrilineal succession. Froma Zeitlin has read Aeschylus' *Oresteia* as the archetypal text for this transition of the subject into paternal law which must conclude with the man's mastery over the woman. In the first play of the trilogy, Clytemnestra is the strong, rebellious, desiring woman who is plotting against the masculine regime of her husband Agamemnon and is in an affair with another man, Aegisthus. After brutally murdering Agamemnon, she is in turn killed by their son Orestes who colludes with her sister Electra to avenge their father's death. Consequently, the Furies, as embodiment of the archaic feminine principle, torment and hunt Orestes down until his case is championed by Athena at Apollo's court. Apollo and Athena justify the

superiority of husband-king-male over wife-queen-female by first arguing that conjugality is more important than blood ties, and then by asserting the primacy of the father in reproduction. Apollo unambiguously states, "The mother is not the true parent of the child" but merely "a nurse who tends the growth/ of young seed planted by its true parent, the male" (ll. 657-59). As an example of the perfection of androgenetic creation, he points to Athena, born of Zeus' head, who gives the final vote acquitting Orestes of all guilt. Athena claims, "No mother gave me birth," (ll. 735) proclaiming that the crime of matricide is outweighed by the murder of the husband-king-male.

It is perhaps no wonder then that Orestes, in Das' "Two Matricides," cannot seem to comprehend Parashuram's dilemmas regarding his crime. While Orestes is yet to reach Apollo's court, Aeschylus' play tells us that the patriarchal culture of Greece would make sure that he finds there an unqualified vindication of his filial allegiance. Yet Das' dialogue introduces a strange gap, an unexpected moment of hesitation, in this narrative: the tired Orestes pauses to take a breath, encounters a traveler from a far-off land, tries to listen to a way of thinking he cannot fully understand. Towards the end of their conversation, as Orestes is getting ready to resume his flight, Parashuram advices him to think more deeply, as "our actions would decide the future of civilization" (56). What would be the stakes of taking Parashuram's advice seriously and rethinking the history of civilization? Ancient Sanskrit texts tell us that Parashuram's story ended with the return of the mother – a point that Das' retelling of the story does not consider. In these ancient narratives, Parashuram's father, happy that his son has obeyed his order, asks him to make a wish. Parashuram uses this opportunity to have his mother returned to life unscathed. This story reveals a secret complicity between the mother and the son that has the potential to undermine the law of the father by turning it to their advantage. Is it then possible to understand the process of civilization as other than one that requires the repudiation, murder, and overcoming of the mother? What can we learn by resituating psychoanalysis in a different economy of desire, one that does not simplistically reproduce the logic of castration, penis envy, and lack?

In her theory of the semiotic *chora*, Julia Kristeva identifies the maternal body as the realm of a mobile, rhythmic, and vocal organization of pre-Oedipal, semiotic drives that are anterior to the symbolic order of language. The mother's body, for Kristeva, is the site of an unrepresentable, pre-discursive, abyssal experience, "a thoroughfare, a threshold where 'nature' confronts 'culture'" ("Motherhood" 238). Maternity represents for her a "material compulsion, spasm of a memory" (239) in which instinctual drives, as yet unsymbolized, are constantly struggling for expression. Describing the semiotic *chora* as the mediating ground for the subject's entry into paternal law, she writes, "[i]ndifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine, this space underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation" (*Revolution* 29). According to Kristeva, in the experience of maternity, the subject undergoes a radical diremption where the boundaries of the self and the other become tenuous, fluid, even unthinkable, and where the alterity within the self emerges as an issue for ethics. If the thetic break initiated by the castration complex marks the child's entry into the law of the father, the *chora*, now as the abjected maternal body, continues to haunt the subject, as a longing to fall back into the choric plenitude, as the fear of being consumed by the phallic mother, or as a deep anxiety over the possibility of losing one's subjectivity. For Judith Butler, however, Kristeva's theorization naturalizes a specific cultural configuration of maternity and ends up consolidating the power of the very law that it seeks to destabilize. In "The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva," Butler argues that for Kristeva, the symbolic order remains thoroughly paternal, in which it is impossible for the feminine to find cultural intelligibility except for temporary eruptions in art, or, more dangerously, through the experience of psychosis and the collapse of cultural life itself. In granting motherhood an ontological

status that is prior to language, Kristeva reifies it in a way that leaves unexamined its construction through discursive mechanisms. As Kristeva maintains the Lacanian stance that the incest taboo founds the subject by severing its relation of maternal dependence, poetic language for her necessarily marks a return to the maternal terrain, thus threatening the subject with psychosis. Butler criticizes Kristeva for not questioning how the "maternal body" might be an effect of the law rather than its cause, how culture might be prohibitive and generative at once, and how repression might actually produce the object it appears to deny. Butler writes:

> The law that is said to repress the semiotic may well be the governing principle of the semiotic itself, with the result that what passes as "maternal instinct" may well be a culturally constructed desire which is interpreted through a naturalistic vocabulary. And if that desire is constructed according to a law of kinship which requires the heterosexual production and reproduction of desire, then the vocabulary of naturalistic affect effectively renders that "paternal law" invisible. What Kristeva refers to as a "pre-paternal causality" would then appear as a paternal causality under the guise of a natural or distinctively maternal causality. (115)

For Butler, the maternal body here becomes no more than another manifestation of the law, such that "a full scale refusal of the symbolic [remains] impossible, and a discourse of emancipation, for Kristeva, is out of the question" (110).

Against Butler's indubitably powerful critique of the *chora*, Emanuela Bianchi offers a phenomenological reading that urges us to see Kristeva's identification of the mother with the *chora* as figurative instead of literal. In turning to the question of ethics, Bianchi interprets the *chora* as figuring an originary dynamic between self and other where – as in the touching-touched relationality of Merleau-Ponty's chiasm or Irigaray's two lips – one side is not subsumed to the other. In this sense, the maternal body emerges as not reducible but "strictly only apprehensible as *chora*, as restless motility, as the dispersal and separation of *choriston*, as an impossible traversal of the unthinkable and unrepresentable abyss between self and other, and as a vertiginous abyss within flesh, within being, within language itself" (139). Similarly, Iris Young, influenced by Kristeva's analysis, writes about the possibility of a mother-child relationship *within* culture that is not necessarily founded on the violent break from the maternal body. In her essay called "Breasted Experience," the mother's body, flowing with sexual drives and desires, becomes a way to reclaim an erotic bond with the child. Young argues that patriarchy has always tried to desexualize mothers because the association of motherhood and sexuality threatens the heteronormative order. This separation between motherhood and sexuality is important for patriarchy in order to ensure her dependence on the man for pleasure. If, for instance, it is acknowledged that the mother experiences erotic pleasure in suckling her child, this would mean that she may find the man dispensable, even within a heterosexual economy. The sexuality of the mother's breast is therefore suppressed by patriarchal culture and is relegated only to its nurturing function. Young interprets the breasts as a bodily site where motherhood and sexuality flow together. If the mother takes pleasure as well as gives pleasure while nurturing her child, then the conception of woman as an idealized self-sacrificing nurturer dissolves. Young maintains that nurturing is an exchange of pleasure, even sexual pleasure, between the mother and the child that threatens patriarchal control over feminine sexuality:

> When I began nursing I sat stiff in a chair, holding the baby in the crook of my arm, discreetly lifting my shirt and draping it over my breast. This was mother work, and I was efficient and gentle, and watched the time. After some weeks, drowsy during the morning feeding, I went to bed with my baby. I felt that I had crossed a forbidden river as I moved toward the bed, stretched her legs out alongside my reclining torso, me lying on my side like a cat or a mare while my baby suckled. This was pleasure, not work. I lay there as she made love to me, snuggling her legs up to my stomach, her hand stroking my breast, my

chest. She lay between me and my lover, and she and I were a couple. From then on I looked forward with happy pleasure to our early-morning intercourse, she sucking at my hard fullness, relieving and warming me, while her father slept. (88-89)

For Young, the erotic relationship between mother and child is a scandal as it shatters the fine line between motherhood and sexuality, renders it undecidable. Even while acknowledging the dangers in defining the maternal body as an extra-discursive site, it would be productive for feminism to say yes to this undecidability, to think through the possibilities it opens up for a feminist ethics that recognizes the radical alterity within language, law, subjectivity, and that does not shy away from affirming sexual difference.

This would also return us to Parashuram and his secret pact with his mother, a pact that would utilize the father's phallic, wish-granting power to undermine his own authority. Unlike Orestes' absolute submission to a paternal law that is founded on a primal matricide, Parashuram's story concludes with the mother's return and thus remains open to other configurations of desire. In Das' reimagining of this encounter between the two, there is a brief moment when Orestes does seem to pause and introspect, as he recalls listening to his dead mother's eyes speaking to him in a language he could not translate. He tells Parashuram that even as he was scurrying through the forests to escape the Furies, he saw two eyes in the moon speak out to him "in another language" ("*onno bhashay*"), urging him to question his dogged belief in the logic of revenge (53). In this medley of different languages imagined by Das – the Greek of Orestes, the Sanskrit of Parashuram, the Bengali through which they attempt to communicate, the sounds of the Furies charging towards Orestes, and even the strange lunar language through which the mother speaks – one wonders whether any translation is possible at all, whether these sounds and voices end up as anything more than desperate noises lost in confusion.

And yet, this encounter between the two heroes ends on a note of declared friendship. The dialogue had begun with Orestes addressing Parashuram as "*bideshi jatri*" ("foreign traveler", 43); it ends with him telling Parashuram "*biday bondhu*, Parashuram" ("goodbye friend, Parashuram", 56). While the dialogue suspends the final word on whether Parashuram could make his thoughts intelligible to Orestes, suggesting instead the possibility of a total failure of communication, what transpires even in this failure, even in this inability to listen to the other speaking, is the journey from "foreigner" (*xenos*) to "friend" (*philos*). The encounter between Orestes and Parashuram, then, instead of synthesizing two individuals and cultures in a way that would disavow and erase their difference, points towards a friendship (*philia*) that is founded on the untranslatable. As Parashuram tells Orestes towards the end of their conversation (in Bengali, of course), "We are treading the same path, we share the same destiny, and yet we are different" (56). While Parashuram had previously called Orestes his own reflection, he now begins to realize that despite the convergences between their actions, their ethical responses are after all distinct, that the image reflected in the mirror does not neatly coincide with oneself, that one's shadow is perhaps never fully one's own, that there is something that resists translation.

And yet, it is this very non-coincidence of their respective positions that brings them closer and turns them into friends, as they begin to share a bond that remains open to possibilities that are otherwise than the mere self-duplication of identity. Indeed, such a bond thrusts the friends beyond themselves and towards an open horizon where it would no longer be possible to simplistically even speak of identity, as if identity could be preserved intact and pure, uncontaminated by the alterity that the other activates in oneself, as if border policing and anti-immigration laws could readily stave off such a contamination. It is perhaps not a coincidence then that this arrival at a friendship grounded on difference happens through a dialogue on the maternal body, the site that figuratively stands for the fundamental schism within language and being. It is as if only in speaking of that maternal

territory where the boundaries between self and other become porous and fragile (without ever being reduced to one another) that these two ancient characters can speak (in) their difference. While acknowledging that both of them had acted according to what Parashuram calls "the morality of the father," their dialogue gestures towards an ethics that is otherwise than paternal. Speaking in modern Bengali about the mother (and her possible return), an ancient Greek and an ancient Hindu hero thus arrive at a logic of friendship and hospitality that is based not on complete agreement, mirroring, or even understanding (of) the other, but instead on a sharing that is pervaded by difference, loss, and untranslatability, pointing to the self-differing nature of friendship as such – friendship as less a transactional reciprocity than an experience of a radical incommensurability within oneself, as a continuous and in(de)finite grappling with the language of the foreigner – friendship itself as foreign, the stranger a friend, the self always already a stranger to itself.

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Notes

[1] All translations from this text are my own. No translation of this text exists yet and I have obtained the official rights to translate it into English.

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The Indefiniteness of Textuality

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Abstract: The 'Interminability of Translation' is evident in the words of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the post-structuralist feminist author, who considers writing as the site where the interplay of language is forever at work. Since the act of translation re-aligns the book in another register, Derrida's method of 'reversal and displacement' applies here, reiterating the open-ended indefiniteness of textuality. This paper intends to study the politics of translation, both in the context of the hegemonic domination, and the subsequent defiance and subversion attempted by the subaltern. It is imperative that the focus shifts from the European perspective of translation, to include the viewpoint of the indigenous languages and cultures. The Western bias must give way to the norms and values of the local beliefs, releasing translation from the clutches of the Eurocentric practices. This endorses what Barthes has to say about all writing consisting of several indiscernible voices, and literature being the invention of these voices to which we cannot assign a specific origin. This paper strives to prove that the translator's voice is equally, or perhaps, more important in this situation.

Keywords: Textuality, Eurocentric, hegemony, indigenous, reversal and displacement

Translation Studies has been under the scanner for quite some time. Some consider it a full-fledged discipline, albeit different from the other established ones like Psychology, Linguistics, Comparative Literature, and so on. Others see it as a wannabe, despite the decades that have given it the respectability of a recognized discipline. In the introduction of his book titled *In Translation: Reflections, Refractions, Transformations*, Paul St. Pierre says that between 1972, when James Holmes proposed translation as an authentic area of research, and 1987, when the Canadian Association of Translation Studies was instituted, the new discipline of Translation Studies gained recognition as a subject (1). Lewis argued that the concepts of source and target language were tied up with European histories and did not apply to linguistic situations in creoles, pidgins and other forms of non-standardized languages and dialects. Since cultures were not homogeneous, it was imperative that the focus shifts from the European perspective of things, to include the viewpoint of the indigenous languages and cultures (ibid 3). The Western bias had to give way to the norms and values of the local beliefs, releasing translation from the clutches of the Eurocentric practices.

The interminability of translation is evident in the words of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the post-structuralist feminist author, who considers writing as the site where the interplay of language is forever at work. In the preface to her translation of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* [(1967) 1997]], Spivak maintains that "by daring to repeat the book and reconstitute it in another register, one re-enacts, hence a book's repetitions are always other than the book" (xii). She reiterates that there was, in fact, no "book" other than these ever-different repetitions: the "book" in other words, was always already a "text," constituted by the play of identity and difference. Spivak upholds that the text has "no stable identity, no stable origin and no stable end, since each act of reading the "text" is a preface to the next" (ibid).

Spivak considers deconstruction through translation as a means of offering an exit or a way out of the closure of knowledge, as by inaugurating the open-ended indefiniteness

of textuality, it shows us the lure of the abyss as freedom (*Of Grammatology* lxxviii). She notes that ultimately it is about "deconstruction, deconstructing deconstruction, both as the search for a foundation, and as the pleasure of the bottomless" (ibid). Spivak points out that our desire is the tool for any deconstruction. She says that desire itself is a "deconstructive and grammatological structure that forever differs from and defers the text of our selves" (ibid). According to Spivak, Derrida's method was 'reversal and displacement'. It was not enough "simply to neutralize the binary oppositions of metaphysics (lxxvii)," as to deconstruct the opposition was first to overthrow the hierarchy and to fight violence with violence. Quoting Derrida, Spivak reiterates that the critic must make room for "the irruptive emergence of a new 'concept,' a concept which no longer allows itself to be understood in terms of the previous regime or system of oppositions (ibid)". She observes that deconstruction entails "locating the promising marginal text, disclosing the undecidable moment, prying it loose with the positive lever of the signifier, reversing the resident hierarchy, only to displace it, to dismantle in order to reconstitute what is already inscribed" (ibid). The idea is to re-appropriate the text by undoing and redoing it, to show the text what it "does not know" (lxxviii).

Derrida's pedagogy, said Spivak, informed the reader that there was "nothing outside of the text, but that within it, in its interstices, in its white spaces and unspokennesses, the reserve of the origin reigned" (ibid). Spivak observed that the act of reading was besieged by the precariousness of intertextuality. Since translation was one version of intertextuality, within the limits of its possibility, it practices the difference between signified and signifier. Spivak noted that it was unprecedented to deal with some "transfer" of pure signified that the signifying instrument or "vehicle" would leave virgin and intact, from one language to another, or within one and the same language, as there might be as many translations of a text as readings, for a text was infinitely translatable (ibid). Derrida summarized it thus: "It was not necessary to search elsewhere, for exactly here, to be sure not in the words, but in words as erasures, in their grill, "the meaning of being" spoke itself, giving to the voice of the teacher that unlimited sovereignty which permitted him to read the text indefinitely" (ibid lxxviii).This holds true of the Ur-*Mahabharata,* a text that has lent itself to several versions, translations and revisionist retellings. Extensively translated in several Indian languages, the text has been mined for myths by the extended diaspora in countries of south-east Asia and Africa. The derivative literature based on *The Mahabharata* has a significant presence in the corpus of Indic texts. Liberty has been taken in terms of storyline of the original, new characters have been added, old ones dropped, till it becomes a tale of contemporaneity, new wine in an old bottle. And perhaps there lies the secret of the longevity of a text which has remained popular for more than 3000 years.

As Spivak notes in her translation of *Of Grammatology*, the task is to dismantle the metaphysical and rhetorical structures which are at work in the text, not in order to reject or discard them, but to re-inscribe them in another way, making the relationship between the re-inscribed text and the so-called original text the relationship between two palimpsests (lxxv). The re-reading of the Indic myths, especially those in the palimpsest that is *The Mahabharata*, has to be done keeping in mind that the signifiers are 'not to be used as a transcendental key that will unlock the way to truth, but as a bricoleur's tool'. The same myths that report abuse and aggression also, in a very subtle manner, share the story of resistance. The need is to think about the Derridean question in the interpretation of our text: How to perceive what is outside of a text? What is a text's own, appropriate margin? Those who have been on the margin have found a voice in the translated stories of male to female trans-sexual transformations, whether it is to experience, as Lacan said in *The Psychoses,* "the prospect of jouissance beyond the phallus that must be attractive to 'normal' men and mystics alike, or the Otherness of Woman's place in the Symbolic Order which

holds the promise of knowledge, full presence, and most compellingly, absence of the lack that dogs the ostensible possessor of the phallus"(145).

This endorses what Barthes has to say about all writing consisting of several indiscernible voices, and that literature being the invention of these voices, to which we cannot assign a specific origin. In his essay titled *The Death of the Author* [(1967) 1977)], Barthes argues that a text does not consist of a line of words, releasing the "message" of the Author-God, but is a space of many dimensions, in which are wedded and contested various kinds of writing, not one of which is original (145). The text instead is a tissue of citations, resulting from a thousand sources of culture. To give an Author to a text is to impose upon that text a stop clause, to furnish it with a final signification, to close the writing, says Barthes (ibid). He posits that the true locus of writing is reading, as a text may consist of multiple writings, issuing from several cultures and entering into dialogue with each other, but there is one place where this multiplicity is collected, united, and this place is not the author, but the reader (ibid). Barthes insists that the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any being lost, all the citations a writing consists of. The unity of a text is not in its origin, it is in its destination as the birth of the reader which must be ransomed by the death of the Author (ibid). The revisionist re-writing based on *The Mahabharata* also involves a reading, reinterpretation and reviewing of the Ur-text, deconstructing it in the process. The aim is to restore the equilibrium by questioning the parent narrative which has chosen to 'privilege' some at the cost of the others, as happened in the case of the gendered subaltern in *The Mahabharata*. The issues of representation, agency and power inform the marginalisation of the women and the queer whose voices have found an outlet in the retellings.

The review of literature on the topic shows that there is a lot of scope for the construction of our cultural history from below through proper translation, and for new interpretations which on one hand question the colonial interpretation of Indic myths and legends, and on the other, support the idea of the exploration of a subaltern consciousness. The portrayal of an 'other' in the translations of our myths has never been given the kind of attention it deserves till very recently, when authors like Sukumari Bhattacharji, Gayatri Spivak Chakravorty, Pratibha Ray, Irawati Karve, Ruth Vanita, Madhu Kishwar, Saoli Mitra, Sashi Deshpande, Chitra Lekha Banerjee Divakaruni and other revisionist writers took up the case and the cause. As Madhu Kishwar says:

> The confusion is not theirs alone; these common misrepresentations are an unfortunate by product of our colonial education which we slavishly cling to, even though it is more than five decades since we declared our Independence. We keep defending or attacking the same hackneyed quotations from the shastras and the epics which, incidentally, colonisers used for the purpose of creating a new discourse about these writings. Their inaccurate and biased interpretations have continued to inspire major mis-readings of our religious tenets. (*From Manusmriti to Madhusmriti: Flagellating a Mythical Enemy* 1)

There are situations when the marginal strikes back, especially in the re-tellings based on the translations. Creative liberty is taken with the storyline, and the tale is re-written from the point of view of the subaltern, whose voice gets centre-stage, to question the colonial or gender-based or caste or class-based agenda of the hegemonic forces. In a translation of Bhyrappa's 'Parva', Bhima wonders what Hidimba would have done if put in Draupadi's situation in the Sabha Parva. Perhaps she would have pulled her oppressor's intestines out and draped it around his neck, thereby giving a new template of empowerment to women who have cowered in fear in our androcentric world. Divakaruni's Draupadi feels the leering Keechak's eyes measuring her up and understands what common women undergo on a daily basis. The violence of the emotional trauma that bursts through in the words of 'Dopdi' in Mahashweta Devi's *Breast Stories'* (1997)

has no parallel in Vyasa's textual universe. At the height of the Naxalite movement, when Dopdi Mehjen is 'made' (raped, assaulted) by the state machinery, she refuses to cower like Draupadi in the dominant discourse. Instead, she stands tall, unashamed of her nudity and thrusts her bloodied, ravaged breasts towards the police officer, proclaiming that she need not be clothed, as there wasn't a man that she should be ashamed of (Devi 33). The defiance of the tribal Dopdi Mehjen is in sharp contrast to the prayers and supplications of the Draupadi of the dominant discourse, who needs a Krishna to save her modesty.

This phenomenon applies to the colonial literature elsewhere also, as the aim behind many a translation was furthering the cause of the Mother Country at the cost of the colony. When the British began the task of translating the Indian Dharma Shastras (Law Books), the reason was far from altruistic. It definitely was easier to govern a nation through its own Law Books, and the essence of diversity, inclusion and liberal ethos were the first values to be sacrificed. India, which has never been an essentialist culture, was bound by a common set of laws, supposedly 'ours', hence applicable to all. The interest of the colonialist was facilitated through the translation, making it a political act rather than literal. Madhu Kishwar says that this left us flagellating an imaginary enemy, in this case the supposed Lawgiver 'Manu', the 'Author' of Manu Smriti, who never said what was put in his mouth. Indian Laws have a tradition of evolving to suit the time and place, yet one single Law Code was imposed to ensure unanimity and smooth governance. This was 'murder' of a living tradition by translation, and the deliberate sowing of the seeds of hatred that we are still harvesting. The responsibility of the translators grows multi-fold when political connotations are involved, when agendas are set by the powers that be, and when the interest of the marginal is sacrificed.

The phenomena of domination by the hegemonic powers and subsequent defiance was true of the colonized satellite countries of erstwhile Soviet Union as well. In his work titled "From Dissidents to Bestsellers: Polish Literature in English Translation", Piotr Kuhiwczak (5, 138) speaks of the 'Velvet Revolutions' that marked the end of an era, and the impact it had on translation. Between the time of the Cold War and these revolutions, though Russia was opening up and restructuring was taking place, the state apparatus still controlled the selection of texts to be translated, for fear of giving out too much. He gives the example of Poland, where poetry as a genre was replaced by other genres of literature. This was facilitated by encouraging the translation of prose and drama, which automatically reduced the importance of the poetry, which, according to the handlers, was more volatile. The politics of translation was evident in the case of Polish literature which awaited a revolution to be made available to the world in its true form.

In his article "Translating the Untranslatable: Septuagint Renderings of Hebrew Idioms", J. Joosten says that it is impossible to translate a text without changing the discourse, because the grammar and syntax of one language is different from another. He points out that translation also changes the unique 'situational context' of the narrative, thereby relocating it in a new context, and hence imparting a different meaning on it. Joosten agrees with the Italian proverb which calls the translator a 'traitor' who is not faithful with the meaning of the original text. This is because the changed context does take away the flavour of the original, adding something of its own in the process. Calling translation at best, 'feasible', Joosten says that in the context of religious texts, any miscommunication in terms of translation will result in sacrilege. Quoting Rabbi Judah, Joosten says that the person who says that he/she has indulged in a literal translation of a work is a liar, and "he who adds to it is a blasphemer". Also, when it comes to idioms, it is impossible to attempt a perfect translation, as the literal meaning belies the intent, opines Joosten. Hence, a 'dark horse' may not be either 'dark' or a 'horse', and to cry wolf may not involve a real 'wolf' at all, making it extremely challenging to keep the metaphorical meaning intact and the spirit alive.

In "Alice in Denmark" (*Voices in Translation: Bridging Cultural Divides*), V.H. Pedersen and K.N. Andersen speak of the Danish translation of 'Alice in Wonderland', and the inevitability of lost puns, making the translation poorer than the original. They make a convincing case of literary translation as an act of negotiation between two literary systems rather than just a linguistic operation. The cultural correspondence that happens between texts is exposed in the six translations of the iconic book, highlighting the 'dubious territory of the limits of translation'.

In her article titled "Mind the Gap: Translating the Untranslatable", Margaret Jull Costa finds a cloud of negativity hanging over the issue of translation. She refers to the sourness of the expression that a work sounds like a translation. She points out that translators are a much-reviled lot, and the idea of the untranslatability of cultural concepts take this negativity one step further. Yet as a full time Spanish to Portuguese translator she believes that if texts lose some in translation, they also gain some. Giving example from four of her own translations, she studies the 'cultural aura' around words, phrases and references (111), and how she deals with it. Richard Jacquemond brings out the context in the following words:

> Translation is not only the intellectual, creative process by which a text written in a given language is transferred into another. Rather, like any human activity, it takes place in a specific social and historical context that informs and structures it. In the case of translation, the operation becomes doubly complicated since, by definition, two languages and thus two cultures and societies are involved. (1992: 139)

Culture is an ongoing performative exercise rather than a concrete structure frozen in time. Multiple contextual responsiveness ensures that the translated texts retain their ground as individual entities, yet keeping intact the core of the original. The voices that echo or ventriloquise the spirit of the original text are re-inventing themselves as corollaries, at times keeping close to the ur-text, and at other times taking the liberty to retell to an extent, resulting in a different version altogether. The fairy-tales with a twist – the ones which are 'politically correct' – may in form be a literal translation, but in essence are liberating to people with modern sensitivities. "The child who is fed tales such as Snow White is not told that the tale itself is a poisonous apple, and the Wicked Queen (her mother/teacher), having herself been drugged by the same deadly diet throughout her lifetime (death-time), is unaware of her venomous part in the patriarchal plot", says Daly (*Gyn/Ecology* 34). The tale of Snow White has been translated in almost every language of the world, yet the variations may want her to respond locally, like in Southern India where apples are not known the fruit may become a mango, as has happened in the case of folk tales based on the timeless story, loosely termed a 'translation', yet taking liberties by a wide margin. In 'Speaking the World: Drama in Scots Translation', John Corbett says that as translations of 'Moliere' were attempted by Scottish dramatists, the spoken idiom on which the drama was based became urban in its setting from the original rural ambience. "MacMillan grew up, not in rural Aberdeenshire, but in the East end of Glasgow", says Corbett, showing the creative liberty taken by poets and translators. This was not betraying the original, but creating new versions and worlds, making the translator an author in his own right. And thus, the creative process continues, setting the eternal chain in motion, for no text in any case is 'original', each being a product of the maze of words created earlier (37).

So, the question arises: Is the translator a second creator? When we take into account the fact that the original text does get a new lease through translation, we are compelled to agree. Though the author of the original may have his signature imprint on the language and the style of the book, the translator, in an attempt to take the text to a new set of readers belonging to a new culture, facilitates the imparting a new flavour to the project, thereby enriching it and widening its reach. The translator acts as a bridge which connects the world of the author and the foreign reader, whose distinct culture and limited vocabulary

of the original may not have allowed him/her to appreciate the original. For the limited loss that the original work suffers in translation, it gains in terms of reach and readability.

In his article titled "On psychological aspects of translation", Bruno Osimo says that Translation science is undergoing a introductory phase of self-definition. He links the study of translation to other disciplines, like linguistics and semiotics. He refers to the advancement in the semiotics of translation, specially Torop's theory of total translation and "inter-semiotic translation or transmutation" (607). He outlines the contributions of Peirce and Torop to the field of translation, and connects it to the unique and evolving field of psychology. According to Bruno Osimo, Torop's totalistic method of translation provided could be utilised better by the concept of "interpretant" as mental sign.

Hence translation studies may question the cognitive confinement of not just academic disciplines and Western cultures, but also other paradigms that are essentialist and totalitarian in approach. It takes an activist role in interrogating the dominant narrative, using the large framework to situate the 'other' in the discourse. The indiscernibility of the process of translation which negotiates between structures, scripts and cultures, languages and dialects proves that 'translation is transformation'. In the given situation, we must enable translation studies to acquire a distinct role of mediation in the charged social, political, and emotional milieu. One must, of course, be wary of the omniscience of the translator–god, who, in the very attempt to bridge the gap, sometimes also ends up appropriating the other language culture.

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Dereification of the Politics of Untranslatability and Interminability

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Abstract: This paper proposes that untranslatability and interminability in translation are both linked not only by the Derridean constant deferral of meaning or difference but also by another consequential factor of reification. A text is labelled and defined as 'untranslatable' only after several attempts at translating it and because it is 'untranslatable' future efforts to revert to the original or re-readings of the translations themselves, efforts to make the unknown known and accessible will continue making interminability both the source and product of untranslatability and vice-versa. In the process, then, untranslatability becomes a commodity which is measurable and quantifiable in relation to other commodities. It is assigned a definition and category changing cultural and social relationships to substantial 'thing' which permeates life in a capitalist society. This definition of untranslatability is repeated structurally and paradoxically gives rise to a market based on interminability of translation production. It is only when one can dereify untranslatability along the models of Cixous who prefers defamiliarizing languages to make it her own and especially Spivak when she speaks of becoming the thing translated, of originary translation which forges a responsible subject, can one think of an apolitical inclusive stance in translation which is crucial to the ethical question that plagues translation and Translation Studies.

Keywords: Untranslatability, interminability, reification, dereification, originary translation, culturing as translation, ethical responsibility

> Even its title is extraordinarily difficult to translate and has been mistranslated (in English) for over ninety years, since Constance Garnet called it *Notes from the Underground* in 1918. Subsequent translators have stayed with that version, with or without the definite article. But it is not what the Russian title means. The Russian title means, literally, "Notes from Under the Floorboards". That, indeed, is what we would have liked to call this translation. We decided to keep to Constance Garnett's title (without the definite article) because, by now, it is the title by which all old readers will recognize it and all new readers will be looking for it. But it is wrong "The underground", even in Mrs Garnett's day, had acquired connotations of conspiracy, insurgency, early tremors of revolution. But in 1864 *podpolye*, the space under the floorboards, referred essentially to the shallow space uninhabitable by humans but inhabited by rodents and, according to Russian folk legend, the abode of devils, demons, evil spirits and other representatives of what Russians call the Unclean Power (*Nechistaya Sila*): creatures more sinister even than conspirators, insurgents or revolutionaries. (Zinovieff vii)

This is an excerpt taken from the translator's Introduction of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*. This excerpt clearly deals with the problems of translation, the inaccuracy and impossibility of translation due to the encounter of different cultures and different historical periods or contexts. The impossibility of translation has somewhat been widely agreed upon by most theoreticians and translators citing either different lexical registers or, its extension, the different cultural and contextual registers as the impediments that plague translation and the history of Translation Studies. However, the passage unintendingly reveals a fundamental paradox - not only have there been numerous translations before but there will also be translations following these for subsequent readers

who "will be looking for it", thereby suggesting a perpetuity of translation. The translator cautions against the untranslatability but simultaneously engages in translation which he/she deems ethical because it is a literal word-for-word translation which is held as the only legit way of accessing the original. The question of ethics in translation is indeed all-encompassing because it deals with the intellectual property/effort of both the original author and the translator. The ways a text should be translated, whether literal or including equivalent cultural idioms or as Benjamin and Schleirmacher, studying the self-reflexivity of language, suggest translating in a way which qualitatively enriches and expands the target language itself while keeping the 'foreignness' of the original text intact even in the target language, have been highly debatable issues adding to the scholarship of Translation Studies. Ethics then, is as varied as the perspectives on translation. One must, however, remember translation is the end-product by and for the service of humans – beings for whom their Being is an issue. Therefore, any ethical question is more often an ontological question and even translation, which seems primarily to be a literary activity having no direct association with the Being of an individual, can also have a more universal ethical stance based on the human ontology for whom translation has come into being. This will gradually make itself apparent by the end of this paper. Coming back to the translator's excerpt, one finds a correlation and interdependence between untranslatability and interminability. The translator proclaims that the Russian title is incorrect and has been mistranslated and then proceeds to rectify the error. In the process the translator performs yet another translation which involves finding other referents of equivalence, giving birth to a chain of synonyms leading to a perpetual deferring of meaning. If the 'sign' is resistant to translation, it inevitably leads to an investigation of ways to represent it, to further referents, to other 'signs', to interminability. Not only is each translation a 'differance' but also because it is a 'differance' it solicits a constant comparison with the original which it can never directly refer to but refer to only by difference and deferral. The first part of this paper seeks to propose that untranslatability and interminability are both integrally linked not only by a constant deferral of meaning perpetuated by untranslatability but by another far consequential factor – that of reification. The second part of the paper engages in ways to dereify the translation industry by specifically looking at Spivak's model of an ethical apolitical and inclusive translation practice.

That translation is essentially a 'production' is clear from its very nature and aim. It is a literary piece but one with a clear intention of being publicly circulated as a commodity specifically designed for consumption and distribution. One may say that all literary works are commodities. True, but here what must be considered is the intention. Works like those of Kafka (which he never published and ordered his friend, Max Brod to burn the unfinished manuscripts), Gerard Manley Hopkins (burned most of his early works after becoming a Jesuit), Nikolai Gogol (burnt the manuscript of Dead Souls, part 2) and many others were intentionally kept away from circulation but the intention of translations are just the opposite – translations have come into existence because of the demand of circulation. However, interestingly, what escapes notice is the politics of untranslatability, that untranslatability is also a commodity and an instance of reification. If the excerpt cited in the beginning of the paper is perused carefully, untranslatability as a commodity manifests itself, " We decided to keep to Constance Garnett's title (without the definite article) because, by now, it is the title by which all old readers will recognize it and all new readers will be looking for it. But it is wrong" (vii). By referring to the incorrectly yet famously translated title, by the 'deciding' to retain the "wrong" but more recognisable title, it is untranslatability that is being sold and measured. The translator is wary of the untranslatability but uses it deliberately as a bait for former and future readers. To have been assigned the definition and category of 'untranslatable', a text has had to undergo

repeated attempts at translation. Untranslatability then is a result of translations and has been structurally reproduced as a category which, far from ceasing, perpetuates its production. Untranslatability has become a commodity permeating into life of a capitalist society. To term something as untranslatable requires agency and reification is a structure built through agency. Complex cultural idioms, inter and intra relationships of languages, encounters with the 'other' and all other such distinct social relations are reduced to a substantial solidified concept or thing or commodity called untranslatability. Untranslatability which is a complex of human relationships has through reiteration and performance (paradoxically, through interminable translations) assumed the form of the objectivity of the natural sciences. It is one of the forms of social appearance, that is, the way in which things appear or give themselves to consciousness in a capitalist society. It has been observed, experimented with, explained and almost created so that it becomes a quantified category, a law which spreads to the whole social system determined by the capitalist mentality. Once it is created, it also becomes manipulable in subtle ways which make individuals relate to it and engage with it as an object of technical control. For instance, if one looks at the arc of thought in a distinguished translator and poet like William Radice regarding his craft, one can find this aspect of untranslatability and reification as an almost inescapable yet an underlying inconspicuous, rather all-prevasive condition. In his Introduction to the *Selected Poems* of Rabindranath Tagore in 2005, he writes that *Gitanjali* has not stood the test of time" because "most of the lyrics that Tagore chose to translate are actually *songs,* intimate combinations of words and melody." He vehemently resists translation by maintaining the stance of untranslatability, "Let me simply say here that I do not believe you can translate songs, and I have not tried to translate songs in this book" (n.p.). However, its very untranslatability poses a challenge to be overcome by Radice himself a few years later as he writes," My new translation attempts to distinguish the various styles and forms in the Bengali original that Tagore was not able to convey in his own, prose translations" (xi). What was once untranslatable is now looked upon as a commodity whose value has to be restored by re-translating thereby ending up as an interminable process entwined in reification. By experimenting with it, he actually reaffirms its untranslatable nature and confirms its status as a quantified category which is why he treats untranslatability with the technical control that a reified commodity requires to perpetuate. This is apparent in the translation of the Gitanjali that Radice engages in a few years later in 2011 where he begins to rethink untranslatability and work through it but unwittingly reveals the mechanistic and technical nature it has assumed in the process:

> Sonnets I translate as sonnets; ballads I translate as ballads; in all the poems where metre and rhyme are important I try to find flexible English equivalents. The songs, however (many of the poems in Gitanjali are songs), I have translated in a way that I hope will instantly convey their song-like character. I preserve the repetitions of the lines that are obligatory when the songs are sung, I indicate the four-part structure of the song by inserting line-breaks. . .(xii)

The rationalisations behind the concept of the untranslatable gives rise to a sort of Marxian fetishism where several abstract ideas which fuse together to give rise to some sense of untranslatability are infact dispelled by branding untranslatability as a concrete pheno-menon which just like price governs the translation market and to some extent the academic world of Translation Studies. It determines interminability, it determines which texts should gain accessibility and wider distribution, it determines which languages are to be rendered significant or insignificant, it determines cultural relationships, it also determines the fate of an author and the politics of the 'other'. It becomes more real than all these real relations combined, leading to a quantification of social reality through pricing or in this case, through measured untranslatability. In this form of reification, the translators as well

as the target audience/readers become alienated from the actual spontaneous verbal and non-verbal idioms and processes of the untranslatable and view them as a single mechanized unit which has already acquired a definition through multiple performances.

Though the translator and the readers are immersed in and socialized into a certain capitalist understanding of Being, it is the translator and sometimes the native reader who, in moments of disruption (untranslatability), become aware of the untranslatable as a commodity, as reified. Heidegger in his revelatory *Being and Time* says, "Dasein is ontically 'closest' to itself and ontologically farthest. . ." (37). The reification of untranslatability and consequently interminability is as pervasive as water is to fish so that the ontical beings and objects enmeshed in it are the nearest to it and therefore the farthest because they are not deliberately conscious of the all encompassing phenomenon. It is so pervasive and built into everything, every relation, even language that it becomes very difficult for one to become aware of it. One does not see it but sees everything in terms of it, through it. However, if the water begins to dry up, a disruption occurs, then a new mode of Dasein emerges where one begins to consciously deliberate and begins to notice properties thereby bringing an intentionality characteristic of the Cartesian subject-object duality. The Heideggerian 'ready-to-hand' mode of being becomes the 'present-at-hand' mode of being. Both are daseins but in the split moment of coping with either of the daseins, a moment of void, a moment of fundamental Dasein arrives which makes things and itself intelligible to us. This moment may be thought of as similar to the moment of class-consciousness to the worker. It is a moment when the worker becomes more than a worker, he becomes the self-consciousness of the commodity as it were and recognizes the flourishing reification of which he is part, as Lukacs adeptly focuses on this moment of self-knowledge:

> The quantification of objects, their subordination to abstract mental categories makes its appearance in the life of the worker immediately as a process of abstraction of which he is the victim, and which cuts him off from his labour-power, forcing him to sell it on the market as a commodity, belonging to him. And by selling this, his only commodity, he integrates it (and himself: for his commodity is inseparable from his physical existence) into a specialized process that has been rationalized and mechanized, a process that he discovers already existing, complete and able to function without him and in which he is no more than a cipher reduced to an abstract quantity, a mechanized and rationalized tool. . . .The quantitative differences in exploitation which appear to the capitalist in the form of quantitative determinants of the objects of his calculation, must appear to the worker as the decisive , qualitative categories of his whole physical, mental and moral existence. (Lukacs 166)

In this case the translator substitutes the worker and and it is he/she who has the ability to become the self-consciousness of the commodity, namely untranslatability and interminability, while being integrated into the process of reification himself/herself. Once this discovery of class-consciousness is made, once he/she is able to see this matrix of rampant reification, once the difference between appearance and reality is laid bare, the translator is ready, much like the worker, to bring about a revolution, to change the fundamental logic of social life, or here, the theories of translation. It is at this moment that the possibility of dereification can overhaul the existing reified manipulative system and establish a more ethically sound system. One can think of Tahira Naqvi's tryst with the translations of Ismat Chughtai who, thanks to Naqvi's translations, is now a well-known writer in Urdu literature. In most of her translations Naqvi does not deal explicitly with the problems of translation intending perhaps the work to speak for itself but some of her rare deliberations on the matter help understand how conscious she was of the problem of untranslatability as a commodity and how delicately she tries to work through it and escape the essential condition of reification. She is aware of the commodification of untranslatability as she maintains:

> Editors and publishers, here and in India, are still looking for smooth translations, demanding idiomatic English, searching for equivalents of Urdu lexicon and syntax in Standard English, mistaking smoothness for authenticity, for quality. In the case of Ismat, you can continue to abbreviate and simplify in an effort to achieve idiomatic accuracy and very soon Ismat is no longer recognizable as herself.

She speaks of all the "textures, sounds and rhythms, its cultural burdens" that must be transported while translating but at the same time acknowledges its impossibility. She understands that untranslatability is essential to the life of a translated text but she is also sensitive of the fact that she, as already being involved in this reified process, needs to accept it and re-examine the terrain of translation, "we must review and reform the ways in which we have handled translation until now." (Naqvi)

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her essay, "Translation as Culture", provides one such possibility of a dereification process by looking at translation more as an ontological exchange and forging than an industry. To her translation is a very personal phenomenon, an intimate affair in which she strips it of all politics (as much as feasible) and seeks an ethical understanding of it. Translation becomes a means of subject formation and culture formation because more than a literary activity, translation is a life-process, the terms of communication, the source of the ego, through which every one of us inevitably undergoes:

> The human infant grabs on to some one thing and then things. This grabbing (*begreifen*) of an outside indistinguishable from an inside constitutes an inside, going back and forth and coding everything into a sign-system by the thing(s) grasped. One can call this crude coding a 'translation'. In this never-ending weaving, violence translates into conscience and vice versa. (Spivak 13)

If certain terms are substituted by others pertaining more directly to the literary activity of translation then the infant and the inside may stand for the translator-reader and the outside may stand for the foreign text. If one now attempts to re-read the passage in this light then one can understand how the external and internal shape each other and how this act of "grabbing" or translating is absolutely essential to the constitution of the ego, the "conscience" which in turn translates or codifies the external ending up in the translator becoming that which is translated and vice-versa. Here, the term "violence" must be noted because violence is associated with any kind of translation. Violence which can be further explained as some intrusion or deprivation is an essential condition underlying translation. Where then can this site of violence be located? Ofcourse the site of violence is both inside and outside of the subject which is constructed by this violence. More specifically, the site of violence is the translated text, "Thus 'nature' passes and repasses into 'culture', in a work or shuttling site of violence." (13) Culture and the self are both products of this constant shuttling translation. Therefore culturing is a form of incessant translation and it is at the site of violence where "originary translation" (14) takes place or the subject comes into being as a "precarious subject of reparation and responsibility" (13). The translated text is moulded out of violence and untranslatability is the violence which is perpetually encountered and overcome (to some extent). The excesses, the deficiencies, the substitutions, the coinage of new forms and terms of equivalence, the struggle to bring oneself and the Other into being are all aspects of the untranslatable (the violence) which is necessary in all works of translation. It is this violence which necessitates the evolution of responsibility and accountability. When translating from one language to the other, "every 'original' is a place-holder for the mother tongue" (14-15), there is a sense of guilt from which arises responsibility or the obligation of reparation. The idioms and singularities of the mother tongue are internalised, belong to the "inside" and constitute the "inside" therefore any attempt to translate the mother tongue is an act of subordination and guilt because one is compelled to view it not as the only existing language but a

language existing among several other scripted and non-scripted languages and/or dialects. This act of translating, Spivak says, is an act of reparation too because one feels responsible towards one's mother tongue:

> This originary *Schuldigsein* – being-indebted in the Kleinian sense – the guilt in seeing that one can treat one's mother tongue as one language among many – gives rise to a certain obligation for reparation. (14)

Interestingly, in her essay "Coming to Writing", Helene Cixous also speaks about this violent displacement and subordination of the mother tongue, trying to come to terms with objectifying the language which has constituted her being:

> Mother German is the body that swims in the current, between my tongue's borders, the maternal lover's soul, the wild tongue that gives form to the oldest the youngest of passions, that makes milky night in the French day. Isn't written – traverses me, makes love to me, makes me love, speak, laugh from feeling its air caressing my throat. My German mother in my mouth, in my larynx, rhythms me. Horror the late day when I discovered that German can also be written. Learning German as a "second language," as they say. Trying to make the primitive language, the flesh of breath, into an object-tongue. (Cixous 22)

Cixous is torn between the language she should write in. Neither French nor English seems to give voice to her seething desire to write herself into language. Neither of them are intimate enough for her to engage in and undo discourse, to make herself visible in language. It is German which is her primordial nourishment, which runs in her veins and which never wants to be something other than herself. However, this personal intimacy with German has taught her something significant which can be understood in terms of Spivak's approach to the mother-tongue or any language that has to be translated. Though Spivak and Cixous come from different backgrounds and their stance towards language and translation differs, one thing which yokes them together is the profound rapturous intimacy with language that they constantly wish to engage in and the treating the body itself as language which brings a deeply personal experimental flavour and attitude towards defamiliarising language and making it their own. Spivak says that the body becomes a script (Spivak 14) due to the process of culturing or translation and one should become that which is translated so that translation can become more responsible and ethical. Cixous proclaims the same relationship of love with the foreign text (default mother-tongue), a love which arises also from responsibility to the mother-tongue which has taught her to love and make love to the Other and never impose ownership on it, to let herself be immersed in and let the language absorb her instead of she imposing herself on it:

> The mother I speak has never been subjected to the gramma-r wolf. In me she sings and muses, my accent is right, but my voice is illiterate. It is she who makes the French language always seem foreign to me. To her, my untamed one, I am indebted for never having had a rapport of mastery, of ownership with any language, for having always been in the wrong, guilty of fraud, for having always wanted to approach every language delicately, never as my own, in order to lick it, to breathe it in, to adore its differences, respect its gifts, its talents, its movements. . . .If you do not possess a language, you can be possessed by it: let the tongue remain foreign to you. Love it like your fellow creature.(Cixous 22-23)

While apparently Cixous insists on retaining the foreignness of the language and Spivak insists on becoming that language, they both have different approaches but are united in making a case for ethical translation, for self-reflexive, introspective, responsible translation born out of love. In slightly contradictory stances both eventually offer possible methods of dereification of untranslatability and interminability.

Translation should not be quantified or measured by trying to standardize the native tongue because according to Spivak:

> the founding translation between people is a listening with care and patience, in the normality of the other, enough to notice that the other has already silently made that effort. This reveals the irreducible importance of idiom, which a standard language, however native, cannot annul. (Spivak 21)

Many translators, as Spivak says, exult and assert their success by subjecting native tongues to the "gramma-r wolf" but it is only the worker (in the capitalist society) and in this case only the loser of language who can see through the illusion. The loser of language can be the translator as well if he/she is part of a language in which he/she no longer thinks in but remains dormant inside as part of his/her Being. To Spivak, the loser has a privilege which the assertive translators wish to claim as their own but can never appropriate it simply because they have not undergone the extension or catechresis of translation, the culturing of originary translation which the losers have undergone:

> When we establish our reputations on transcoding such resistant located hybridity, distinct from the more commonly noticed migrant hybridity, we lose the privilege of the loser because we claim that privilege. The translators in Cataldi and Napaljarri's book placed their effort within resources for a cultural performance of the second degree. They were not themselves constricted by the violence of this culture performing itself, as originary and catachrestic translation – the coming into being of the responsible subject as divined by Klein. (16)

Lukacs' worker echoes the same receptive and discerning perspective of the loser of language and even though the capitalist has the privilege of a seemingly objective view, his view is distorted as he thinks he is the source of all activity but the worker who is the real loser and formed by the catachrestic translation of reification in a capitalist society can see above this illusion and is the actual wielder of the privilege being claimed by someone else:

> But for his [capitalist] consciousness it necessarily appears as an activity (albeit this activity is objectively an illusion), in which effects emanate from himself. This illusion blinds him to the true state of affairs, whereas the worker, who is denied the scope for such illusory activity, perceives the split in his being preserved in the brutal form of what is in its whole tendency a slavery without limits. (Lukacs 166)

Rabindranath Tagore's English translation of the Gitanjali is different from Radice's mentioned before because Tagore has the privilege of the loser of language. Radice was never subjected to the violence of Bengali culturing the subject whose mother-tongue it was. Having never been exposed to this violation of originary translation which enables the becoming of a subject in one's own mother-tongue, Radice cannot yet become a responsible and ethical subject. Tagore, however, has, through the repeated performances of the culturing of his mother-tongue, undergone the process of violation and becoming. His prose translations of Gitanjali are then not a failure of translation but his ethical stance which he has gained by the process of originary translation followed by the necessity of reparation which is possible only when one can find equivalences among languages, abandoning the idea that the mother-tongue is the sole exclusive language and instead looking at it as just another language among many others. Translation becomes more ethical when this sense of guilt at looking at one's mother-tongue as an equal among equals contrarily also gives one perspective about the status of languages and why it is important to become that which is translated. Tagore says in an interview to *Musical America*, 1920:

> A translation may be a re-incarnation but it cannot be identical. . . the sound of a word has a significance utterly apart from its meaning, …as you cannot take the sound of a word but only its meaning into another language, just so you can never really translate from one language into another.

Elsewhere in an interview to the *Portland Press in Washington*, 1916, he says:

> My English translations are not the same. Each country has its symbols of expression. So when I translate my work I find new images and present new thought and finally it is something almost new. The fundamental idea is the same but the vision changes. *A poem cannot be translated, it can only be relived in a different atmosphere.* (Dasgupta)

Tagore's translations of Gitanjali are what they are because to him English and his mother-tongue occupy an equal status. He becomes the language/text he translates by thinking of it as a "re-incarnation". He understands the issue of untranslatability but he rethinks it through Spivak's ethical working of translation which for him at that time was encapsulated in the concept of it being a re-incarnation, a new site of semantic and semiotic intercourse in the language he is translating, a respect born paradoxically from the guilt of reparation towards his own mother-tongue.

   To dereify translation and the untranslatable industry, to preserve the privilege of languages being translated, the act of translation has to begin to develop a responsibility akin to what Spivak poses. To Spivak, responsibility is an ethical stance of completion, of dialogue, of exchange and of response which significantly consummates the relationship between the speaker and the listener, leaving enough discursive space for the Other to exist as equal, in a bond of love. This act of love is Spivak's and an ethical translator's imperative to translate:

> This founding task of translation does not disappear by fetishizing the native language. Sometimes I read and hear that the subaltern can speak in their native languages. I wish I could be as self-assured as the intellectual, literary critic and historian, who assert this in English. No speech is speech if it is not heard. It is this act of hearing-to-respond that may be called the imperative to translate. (Spivak 22)

Jhumpa Lahiri's *Whereabouts* is a work of self-translation from the original Italian version which she had written. She has spoken at length about this process of intense reading and re-reading. What emerges noticeably in her awareness of the process of translation, is the bond of love, the attachment that she feels and experiences for both English and Italian, a bond as it were between two separate consciousnesses. This is because translation becomes a dialogue with two parties of equal status. Translation becomes ethical because it relies on the act of "hearing" the Other in order to "respond":

> But working with Italian, even a book that I have myself composed slips surprisingly easily in and out of my hands. This is because the language resides both within me and beyond my grasp. The author who wrote *Dove mi trovo* both is and is not the author who translated them. This split consciousness is, if nothing else, a bracing experience. . . I now have a certain residual affection for *Dove mi trovo*, just as I do for its English counterpart—an affection born from the intimacy that can only be achieved by the collaborative act of translating as opposed to the solitary act of writing.

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Queer Untranslatability in *Cereus Blooms at Night*

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Abstract: This article explores the intersection between the concept of untranslatability and queerness, in order to examine the ways queerness can be thought beyond the binary options of assimilation to the state and the theoretical refusal of politics. Drawing instead on Hortense Spillers' idea of a grammar as delimiting possibility through semantics and syntax, I argue that untranslatable queer affect can be read against specific grammars. *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996) by Shani Mootoo exemplifies how affect which cannot be translated into the terms of the dominant colonial grammar retains subversive potential. In the novel, this grammar is marked by heteronormativity and 'miscegenation' taboos. When a queer event destabilizes the dominant grammar, queerness is shown to be an underlying current. Rather than 'translating' queer affect into institutionalized grammars, analyzing queer untranslatability as potential points towards an opening that challenges Eurocentric comparative practice. In *Cereus Blooms at Night*, the protagonist embodies untranslatability and her legacy makes possible queer connections, untranslatable to the dominant grammar.

Keywords: Fiction, Untranslatability, Colonial, Grammar, Queer

The term queer has undergone many different semantic translations – from 'strange' to 'homosexual' to buzzword or a radical politics. Rather than providing a stable definition of queer, I am interested in whether queer maintains radical potential without being re-absorbed into the framework of the Eurocentric nation-state. This article is concerned with how queer can function through untranslatability as something that reveals open-endedness, as a possibility towards 'something else'. My starting points are the queer options of either 'assimilation' or 'refusal' through which the Western dominated discourse is often framed. Both are arguably premised on a prior understanding of 'identity', of 'being known'. Both function through the grammar of the nation-state, whether positioned 'inside' or 'outside'. I suggest instead focusing on the spaces in-between and beyond, those that defy easy conceptualisation. To do so, I ground the potential of queer in a grammar that is rooted in a specific history and forms the basis of un/translatability. Drawing on Hortense Spillers' suggestions that places are organised through a grammar which determines the syntax and semantics of what is possible, I am looking at the traces of British colonial grammar in a fictionalised colonial context. Specifically, how queer, hereafter largely synonymous with non-normativity, translates in relation to a dominant grammar.

I am proposing that reading postcolonial works of fiction for instances of queer untranslatability in relation to a dominant grammar can open up what queer means beyond the binary options of refusal and assimilation. Postcolonial fiction can create space for the difficult negotiations between gendered and sexual non-normativity and the remnants of the colonial moment of rupture. Literary inquiry allows for those affects, silences, desires, movements, and negotiations that do not fit into conventional analysis to take shape. This means that what is untranslatable into the grammar through which we make sense of things, is momentarily foregrounded as carrying subversive potential. Silence, nonsense, meanings unspoken or implied, resist association with 'proper' identity formation. I focus on processes of meaning-making, rather than textual aesthetics. The concept of

untranslatability, as will be explained, is rooted in Comparative Literature which has long been criticised for its Eurocentrism. As such, knowledge production in the academic discipline is not innocent of historical and continuing injustices based on colonial, racist and gendered violence. Anti-Black violence today in the USA, Europe and other parts of the world, is deeply connected to the 'carnal knowledge', of colonial grammars, as highlighted in different ways by thinkers like Hortense Spillers,[1] Audre Lorde,[2] Frantz Fanon,[3] Joan Anim-Addo,[4] Ann Stoler,[5] Saidiya Hartman,[6] and many others. Black Trans people especially are made to bear the consequences of this grammar that normalised such violence. It is important to remember that knowledge production is not just a theoretical exercise, but directly linked to the necropolitics, coined by Achille Mbembe,[7] governing life and death. I understand queer theory as a politics towards liberation from multiple intersecting oppressive systems.

In my reading of Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996), untranslatable queerness is set against a colonial grammar, which is dominated by 'miscegenation' laws and compulsory heteronormativity. Queerness emerges through the complicated and ambivalent experiences of life itself, rather than through institutional discourse. As a mixed-race non-binary person myself, who benefits from white privilege and is positioned in Europe, my understanding of the cultural contexts of the novel is necessarily limited. I do not attempt 'correct' interpretations, but rather seek out different queer responses to a dominant grammar.

I aim to combine discourses around radical queerness with untranslatability and alternative theories on affect, generating new ways to understand the potential of untranslatability. While I question the need for a universalising theory of queer, I am interested in the relationship between non-normative affect and specific dominant grammars and the untranslatable forms queer can take. This is kept open to include untranslatable language, utterance, affect, silences, and embodiments. I argue that queerness is underlying the colonial Christian grammar in *Cereus Blooms at Night.* A queer event destabilised the social and political order, leading to the main character to embody untranslatability. She is paving the way for other queer affects to challenge the dominance of the white Christian colonial grammar, opening up the possibility of 'something else'.

Queerness and the Grammar

In order to examine the dynamic between queerness and a specific dominant grammar through untranslatability, it is useful to outline what is at stake. Theories on radical queerness often position the queer subject against nation-state, its borders and identity categories.[8] The demand to remain unknown to the state, as prominently proposed by Lee Edelman, asks of queer people to embrace the 'death drive' to resist liberal futurity.[9] This position, however, has been criticised by a 'Queer of Colour Critique' (e.g. José Esteban Muñoz, 2009), to be a possible condition only for the privileged queer subject that already has achieved fundamental protection of their queerness.[10]

The key question is how queerness functions beyond binaries of refusal/assimilation, and prescriptive/descriptive, personal/systemic theory. Rahul Rao, in his recent work 'Out of Time' (2020), argues that focusing on space, and particularly on postcolonial spatiality, can reframe the discourse. Turning to postcolonial spaces opens up a critique of how the conditions that delimit the possibilities what queer means are embedded in global histories. Rao cautions us to not romanticise the postcolonial space through a singular understanding of queerness. He criticises that the arguments which map homosexuality or homophobia onto specific nation-states through reference to the moment of colonisation 'have bought into a common nativism, whereby forms of desire and prohibition that cannot be shown to have existed within the boundaries of the nation are ipso facto illegitimate' (Rao 19).

Pointedly phrased as '"pinkwashing" of the pre-colonial past,' (ibid.) the recent rise in retrieving the archives to argue for the existence of non-normative sexualities risks following a circular logic. Rather than analysing queerness, from a Eurocentric 'modern' perspective, projected onto the past, Rao draws on Hortense Spillers' concept of a state grammar to configure relations grounded in a specific location.

Spillers situates the captive Black female[11] body in the semantics of the symbolic order of the United States, arguing that an 'American grammar' (68) was established through the rupture of the Middle Passage and slavery. Based on her examples of white naming practices of Black kinship formations, she argues that the social position of Black Americans is enabled by the 'laws of American behaviour that make such syntax possible' (79). Considering that states follow specific semantics and syntaxes that derive from particular histories, it becomes clear that conceptual mutations of queer are linguistically forged historical struggles. Spillers demonstrates that what makes a possibility in the present is intrinsically linked to historic violence. Additionally, the colonial roots of this historical violence have arguably affected the gendered dynamics of multiple locations, constituting the specific grammar of various postcolonial spaces. As Rao suggests, 'We might think of the grammar of the state, then, as its dominant symbolic order, 'the ruling episteme' that is forged in the originary foundational violence to which it owes its existence, a violence that marks a beginning but "is really a rupture and a radically different kind of cultural continuation"' (214–215, quoting Spillers 68).

The potential of queer to open up radical alternatives as negotiations beyond assimilation or refusal therefore depends on the historical circumstances that formed the dominant grammar. The colonial roots of the dominant grammar are steeped in the historic rupture of enslavement, and carry its 'cultural continuation' into the syntax and semantics of different postcolonial contexts. Tracing the knowledge systems behind colonial contexts, Ann Stoler argues that colonial taxonomies contribute to reifying 'carnal knowledge' in order to maintain control over colonial subjects.[12] Carnal knowledge describes the colonial management of sexuality, relationships, family, intimacy and affect, especially along the lines of gender and race, by which normalcy and its deviance are institutionalised. Rather than repeating the taxonomies that order the lives of colonial subjects by 'comparing' affect to a fixed notion of 'known' normalcy, 'unruly practices' (Stoler xi) trace the relationship between queer affect and a specific grammar which remains anchored in its history. Such a bottom-up analysis allows us to interrogate non-normative affective negotiations for what they are, opening up new theoretical possibilities.

Re-thinking Untranslatability and Affect

Analysing affect as 'unruly practice', is to examine the struggles between queer intimacies, desires, embodiments, textual openness and a specific grammar that delimits 'what is possible'. These struggles are not necessarily identified as 'queer struggles', or waged through conventional signifiers for non-normativity. Taking up Rao's invitation to form an account of queer postcolonial connectivity that is 'more attuned to desire, intimacy, affect, and movement in those everyday realms in which the state, law, and its genealogies are not overwhelming preoccupations' (Rao 220), untranslatability can open up ways of queer response, negotiation, and resistance to the semantics that translate queerness into either abjection or normativity.

Taking up untranslatability as a political intervention into the perennial discussion on what Comparative Literature is, Emily Apter deconstructs the discipline's 'translatability assumption' (Apter 3) by tending to the constitutive outside, that which is not easily absorbed into the Western claim to universality. Premising the creation of knowledge about the Other as central to colonialism, translation functions as a tool to make the

Other legible on the coloniser's terms. The question arises how untranslatability can be used, in its demand of alterity, to deconstruct the premises of comparison itself, and which forms it can take on as a queer practice. Recent attention to the intersection of queerness and translation has either largely ignored untranslatability[13], or focused on untranslatability[14] and only marginally touched on queerness.

Untranslatability as a disruption of meaning is as a move towards what Gayatri C. Spivak has coined 'planetarity'. Planetarity takes the place of globality, by positioning the planet as the 'species of alterity, belonging to another system' (Spivak 72). While the globe is scattered, overwritten already with hierarchies and universals, 'transcendental figurations of what we think is the origin of [the] animating gift [of being intended toward the other]' (ibid. 73), the planet remains an undivided sphere, a system we can never make sense of, yet inhabit 'on loan' (ibid. 72). Planetarity deconstructs the local/global dichotomy and reminds us of the spaces beyond and in-between. Each intention towards each Other is based on the absence of epistemologies, as much as it is configured within the image of a totalising presence. Paying attention to silences, non-translations, mistranslations or awkward translations, destabilises the supremacy of the dominant grammar. The struggle between theoretical possibilities and practical obstacles, between a dominant grammar and queer lives, opens up 'something else' which makes it possible for untranslatability to function 'not from language to language but from body to ethical semiosis, that incessant shuttle that is a "life"' (ibid. 28).

Reading literature for those affects that are not expressed through a queer politics, or even through spoken language itself, allows for an insight into the movement 'from body to ethical semiosis'. In other words, if untranslatability is central to language translation, it is also central to the systems of meaning-making that are bodily, unnamed, or silenced. Intervening in the mind/body dualism of Western philosophy, affect theories highlight emotive and embodied knowledge. Responding to Sara Ahmed's influential contribution of 'affective economies'[15] in which affects circulate, leaving impressions on bodies, Joan Anim-Addo draws attention to how the specific relations of the plantation economy complicate such notions. Focusing on temporal and spatial dimensions, she argues that 'Neither affect nor community remains a stable category, for each moves through history and time' (18) Localising affect whilst simultaneously proposing that attention to the specificities of colonial encounters changes how affect is embodied, guides 'creolising affect' towards planetarity. Anim-Addo's suggestion to view 'affect as silence, masking and disruptive performance' (7) takes seriously the specific affect of the plantation economy. Affect that is untranslatable, or difficult to translate, into a language comprehensive to the grammar, functions similarly as 'an affective register resistant to instant decoding' (14). That is not to universalise 'creolising affect', but to build vocabularies of untranslatable affects that are specific to their postcolonial contexts. Connected by histories of the carnal knowledge of colonial violence, such registers of untranslatability reach beyond language, but centre resistant body-minds as crucial and resourceful in navigating the dominant grammar's gender regimes.

Cereus Blooms at Night: Queerness underlying Colonial Society

Cereus Blooms at Night by Shani Mootoo is set on Lantanacamara, a fictional island in the Caribbean, during colonialism. It follows the stories unfolding around the life of Mala Ramchandin, the daughter of Indian converts who are themselves children of indentured labourers. The story is framed by and told through her interactions with Tyler, a 'gay' nurse in a home for the elderly in a town called Paradise. Full of queer connections, the novel captures how different characters respond to a queer rupture of the social order which is held up by strict racial hierarchies. Through untranslatable affects, particularly

Mala Ramchandin's 'loss of language', but also through intimacies and gender identities that exist beyond the legibility of the dominant grammar, the colonial order is destabilised. Navigating queer desires and identities, Mootoo's characters transgress the grammars officially available and open up possibilities of reading queerness as a dynamic always already underlying colonial society. Situated in a moment of rupture, queerness here is not in a singular relationship with official institutions and dominant grammars. Instead, the novel portrays a struggle in which untranslatable affect encompasses what cannot be made intelligible, yet forms the ground for possibility.

Colonial society forms its dominant grammar on the rupture that creates the category of 'race'. Implicating gender, class, caste, ability, and so on, race functions as the result of racism, itself fundamental to the epistemological regime that aims to continuously justify the colonial project. Lantanacamara's grammar is based on a Christian colonial order upholding miscegenation laws and heteronormativity.[16] This is exemplified by the central presence of the missionary family, the Thoroughlys. They adopt Chandin, later Mala Ramchandin's father and abuser, away from his family, whom Chandin turns to view as inferior. Converting to Christianity, Chandin mimics the Thoroughlys' behaviour, speech and dress, quickly becoming 'embarrassed by his parents' reluctance to embrace the smarter-looking, smarter-acting Reverend's religion' (Mootoo 30) and ascribing his community's social position to a 'result of apathy and a poverty of ambitions' (ibid. 31). Through 'observ[ing] his new family and listen[ing] to their conversations' (ibid. 32), Chandin takes on their vocabulary. In Homi K. Bhabha's terms, Chandin becomes 'a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite' (Bhabha 122). How 'thoroughly' the colonial management of race and gender is manifested in Lantanacamara's grammar is evident through Chandin's courting of Lavinia, the Reverend's white daughter. Chandin's love for Lavinia is accompanied by intensified self-loathing on the basis of race. When the Reverend condemns Chandin's love for 'his sister', the dominant grammar's miscegenation taboo is revealed as a principle semantic.

The emphasis on race in the Christian colonial state grammar is highlighted by the hypocrisy of Lavinia's eventual marriage and divorce from her white cousin in the 'Shivering Northern Wetlands' (Mootoo 38), fictional for England. The same social taboo is re-purposed on racial lines to secure the myth of 'white purity'. Similarly, racial hierarchies play an important role in the securitisation of Trinidad's[17] state grammar. Indentured labourers were seen to join the workforce on their own accord, yet ended up in another form of enslavement. Chandin's father made the journey for future generations to succeed in ways he could not; in the Caribbean 'it was easier to slip out of caste' (ibid. 27). Yet, as the novel makes obvious, discrimination based on race, substitutes casteism in the dominant grammar. The management of intimacies, affects, relationships, and identities holding up the social order is organised around race to reinforce white supremacy. As Grace Hong argues, 'colonial manifestations of discourses on propriety, morality, and sexuality are always implicitly a register of the contemporary effects of economic internationalization and the consequently altered role of the nation-state' (75), and we might add to that, of a colony's grammar. The gossip that ensues in Lantanacamara after Sarah and Lavinia leave the island as a couple, reinforces underlying 'anxieties' that non-normative sexualities evoke for the social order.

The Centre Cannot Hold

The grammar is destabilised, its cracks start showing. This queer event triggers change on Lantanacamara, traced throughout the novel through Mala's horrific abuse and eventual seclusion, as well as through future possibilities. However, the rupture arguably highlights not a beginning, in which queer is either accepted or rejected, but rather 'a radically

different kind of cultural continuation' (Spillers 68), in which untranslatability surfaces, disrupting the illusion of stability. After being rejected by the Thoroughlys for his love for Lavinia, Chandin decides in a rage to marry Sarah, an Indian convert herself. Lavinia's relationship with Sarah that ensues in the shadow of Chandin's gaze, poses a fundamental risk to the social order. Lavinia's queerness destabilises the role of whiteness in the novel and its claim to moral supremacy, which is based on the Christian ideal of a cis-hetero family unit and implied miscegenation laws. The two women's relationship challenges this grammar. It emerges from their close childhood friendship into an intimacy that is expressed through secrecy, 'whispering and giggling' (Mootoo 57) and gestures narrated through the glimpses Mala catches as a child, like 'the tips of Aunt Lavinia's fingers grasping Mama's waist' (ibid. 56). These affective gestures are multi-dimensional and thus hard to classify. Chandin and Sarah's marriage, its intelligibility, rests precisely on the untranslatability of these queer affective gestures. So much so that the gossip that ensues on Lantanacamara after Sarah and Lavinia's escape is spoken 'under their breath and with hands perched at their lips' (ibid 65). The villagers' unease to discuss what happened derived from guilt, 'for they felt as though they were discussing, not the Ramchandins or Lavinia, but rather their Reverend, their church and their God' (ibid.) Doubt about the missionary's knowledge and belief systems functions like a collective and constant current that underlies what can be said. The white Christian colonial grammar is momentarily exposed as a centre that cannot hold.

Yet, there is no possibility of a 'return' to a grammar 'before' the securitisation of race as ordering social hierarchies. The colonial grammar emerged from the rupture of enslavement, indenture, and missionary education which set the realm of an 'official intelligibility'. Mala is later described as someone 'whose father has obviously mistaken her for his wife, and whose mother had obviously mistaken another woman for her husband' (ibid. 109), re-framing Mala's rape and Sarah's queerness through an explanation that relies on a 'mistake' within the norm. The social order situates queerness as grammatically captured by race. While Sarah and Lavinia do not stake political claims against the colonial grammar of Lantanacamara, their relationship reveals the impact of untranslatability to make use of affects, gestures, silences foregrounding the violence upon which the colonial grammar is founded. Queerness as underlying the state grammar is woven throughout the semantics of the social order. Rather than being 'recovered' or 'discovered', it is made sense of through the gaps, or fissures, of the grammar. Instead of searching for an idealised, readily translatable 'authentic' 'native' name for queer affect, Smith points out that 'the local names for things do not inherently promise liberation' (Smith 10). Mootoo herself puts into question the claim to any 'authenticity' by situating her story on fictionalised land. On Lantanacamara untranslatability remains crucial to convey queer affect.

Embodying Untranslatability

Central to the novel is Mala Ramchandin's relationship to language. As such, she embodies untranslatability when Tyler first encounters her at the Paradise Alms House. Miss Ramchandin, seen as 'frightful' by the other nurses, is put in the care of Tyler, who shows patience towards her muteness, interrupted only by 'mournful wailing' (Mootoo 17). She is strapped onto her bed, disciplined and punished for her 'inability' to express herself. Tyler recognises a mutual state of 'being different', which leads him to realise a human connection, despite the heavily institutionalised context, and that his 'actions spoke more eloquently than any words' (ibid.). Her untranslatability is perceived in the institution as a sign for a lack of agency. She does not verbally agree, nor disagree to her treatment, nor does she give clear non-verbal signs through which agency could be conventionally read. Instead, Tyler notices her masking certain affects by noticing his own reaction to

her. Not to appropriate her affective register, but rather, in a move towards 'planetarity', realising his own knowledge systems being put into question through the encounter. He 'felt an empathy for her clenched fists, defiant stare, pursed lips and deep, slow, calculated breathing – am empathy that words alone cannot describe' (ibid. 19). The limits of language are not an obstacle to their connection, but rather make it possible. When Mala starts making the sounds of 'bird, cricket and frog calls' (ibid. 24), Tyler interprets her untranslatability through their 'shared queerness' (ibid. 48), bridging the differences that yet rely on their mutual differentiation from the semantics of the colonial grammar. He accepts her communications, her knowledge and resilience without translating into the grammar of the racialised social order which would see them both othered and institutionalised.

Mala's embodiment of untranslatability occurs after an intensely violent and graphically narrated encounter with her father, leading to Chandin's death and Mala's dissociation from a reality that was too painful to bear. She becomes unrecognisable to her short-termed lover Ambrose, and retreats into seclusion. Having no one to communicate with, her relationship to language radically changes. While the loss of communicable language is a recurring gothic trope of the 'isolated crazy woman', Mootoo details the process, worth quoting at length:

> 'In the phase just before Mala stopped using words, lexically shaped thoughts would sprawl across her mind, fractured here and there. The cracks would be filled with images. Soon the inverse happened. A sentence would be constructed primarily of images punctuated by only one or two verbalizations: a noun tentatively uttered in recognition, a descriptive word confirming a feeling or observation. A flock of seagulls squawking overhead might elicit a single word, *pretty*. That verbalization, she came to understand, was not the feeling itself but a name given to the feeling: *pretty*, an *unnecessary translation* of the delight she experienced seeing the soaring birds. Eventually Mala all but rid herself of words' (ibid. 126, my highlight of 'unnecessary translation')

The reader witnesses this process from Mala's perspective, illustrating untranslatability as a potentially empowering semantic alternative. The 'cracks' in her 'lexically shaped thoughts' reveal the fragility of syntactical language to hold affect, silence, meanings that 'do not fit'. As a conscious process, Mala realises the 'unnecessary translation' of feelings into words, emphasising the arbitrary connection between signified and signifier. Mala embodies untranslatability, thereby disassociating from the possibility of being re-absorbed, neither into a discourse of assimilation, nor of refusal.

Her struggle with the past is also a struggle with the historic violence of the particular colonial grammar. 'Lexically shaped thoughts', first become 'fractured', like the rupture that forms the violence with which different communities are displaced onto Lantan-acamara. The images that take the place of her lexicon instead are severed from the demands of the imposed Christian colonial grammar, syntax and semantics become open ended. Seeing birds fly, symbolic for a freedom she cannot otherwise claim, provides an experience of delight. Mala finds comfort in observing her surroundings and her intuitive feelings, rather than recovering a position within the imposed grammar that stopped 'making sense' for her. Giving up on the syntax that ordered life in a way which led to her violation, she furthermore re-orders time through the smell of decay, as the 'aroma of life refusing to end' (ibid. 128), and space, by stacking furniture to hide away the entrance to the room with father's corpse. It is not just Mala who changes, but the whole framework of space-time, thereby disturbing the possibilities of the particular translation necessary for upholding the symbolic order.

Mala's relationships to space and time are strategically untranslatable. 'At ten o'clock in the morning Mala knew the sun would catch on a jagged edge of the back porch roof where the iron was torn' (ibid. 132). The event triggers the moment her mother and

Aunt Lavinia left years ago. As space and time take on radically different meanings, she one day 'began strategizing against it' (ibid.). By first inhaling bird-pepper sauce and then putting it on her tongue, she undergoes intense physical pain, nausea and exhaustion, desensitising herself. 'Her flesh had come undone' (ibid. 134) – It forms a violent bodily disruption of her embodiment of untranslatability, an affective performance to remember that 'she had survived' (ibid.). The physical memory of the particular space and time, altered by the hot sauce, triggers her speaking words, begging to not be left behind. For a moment, she translates the pain she carries into words, evoking an affective memory, as 'alienated property of a body' (Karavanta 14). Mala reclaims her past and future to assert life in the present, and to heal her younger self by invoking her childhood name (Pohpoh) as a figure besides her when the police searches her house. Affective memory disrupts the securitisation of the grammar by highlighting the misrepresentation of space, time and syntax as linear. Mala/Pohpoh 'trespasses' through time and space, when Mala talks to an imagined PohPoh next to her, and lives vicariously through dreams of her childhood self, running through the Thoroughlys house.

Queer Connections

The queer scandal surrounding the Ramchandins stands in close connection to both Tyler's and Otoh's stories of non-normative gender identities. Their identities remain untranslatable as there are no appropriate names available. On Lantanacamara, as in many (post-)colonial contexts, visibly queer characters are not captured by the simplifying binaries of 'authentic versus imposed names'. Tyler, who tells Mala's story, grows to find comfort in himself based on the queer legacy of the latter's story. Her memories are passed on to him through affective gestures, for example her stealing a dress from the female nurses for him to wear. Tyler mentions himself as 'neither properly man nor woman but some in-between, unnamed thing' (Mootoo 71), existing beyond the syntax of the state grammar which does not allow for 'neither/nor', and 'both/and' to be inhabited by one body. Even though his femininity evokes gossip among the other nurses, it allows not only the connection with Mala, but also with Hector, the gardener who uses Tyler as a reference, recognising in him his lost brother. Tyler is aware of his own position with regard to Mala, as well as to the generational legacy of how his 'unnamed', untranslatable self exists in relation. On the very first page, he addresses the reader writing, 'However, I cannot escape myself, and being a narrator who also existed on the periphery of the events, I am bound to be present' (ibid. 3). His presence is not just a sign of accountability towards the story, but also of the queerness underlying Lantanacamara's grammar. Like a palimpsest, non-normativity is a hidden presence, the periphery of the narrative which enables it to become legible, to be written.

Furthermore, Ambrose's son, Otoh's, gender identity is not questioned but instead exposes colonial taxonomies. Otoh's masculinity challenges claims to authenticity and what is considered 'natural' or 'scientific'. He is 'so much like an authentic boy that Elsie soon apparently forgot she had ever given birth to a girl' (ibid. 110). 'Passing' as a boy, Otoh uses the language available to him, without having to refer to a 'prior' state of either the nation or himself. Untranslatability here functions to interrupt the translation between what is considered 'reality' and language. Rather than society questioning the signifier 'boy' in relation to his body parts, the system of translation is deconstructed. 'So flawless was the transformation that even the nurse and doctor who attended the birth, on later seeing him, marvelled at their carelessness in having declared him a girl' (ibid.). The attention lies precisely on the space between signifier and signified, such that 'reality' loses authority. Rather than looking for a scientific 'authenticity', untranslatable queerness reveals a communal difference to the social order, thereby destabilising the science behind

the carnal knowledge of colonialism. When Elsie momentarily foregrounds Otoh as 'different', she does so by referring to his kind of queerness as communal, asking, 'You grow up here and you don't realize almost everybody in this place wish they could be somebody or something else?' (ibid. 237-8). The wish towards 'something else', as an unnamed, yet-to-come condition, unites Lantanacamara's residents in their situation under a colonial grammar which delineates and prescribes the possibilities of language and being. Otoh and Tyler bond through their connection with Mala, itself based on a mutual difference. '*I am different*! You can trust me, and I am showing you that you are the one person I will trust' (ibid. 124). While the particular differences remain untranslatable, it is the 'showing', a relational act, that opens up the possibility for trust.

I have shown that the concept of untranslatability can be used in literary analysis to interrogate queerness as a radical concept. Beyond queer refusal or assimilation politics, untranslatability highlights those affects that are grounded in the specific circumstances of (post)colonial grammars. Such negotiations between queerness and gendered and racialised grammars, illustrate queer politics from a bottom-up perspective, in which language itself always already interacts with unnamed bodily affect and silences. Given that little work has been done on the intersection of untranslatability and queerness, the discourse could be progressed in multiple directions. Further research should be done into the specific modes of (post)colonial untranslatability in relation to grammars. I am aware that untranslatability is a concept with various meanings. It would be pivotal for (queer) interdisciplinary studies to engage different uses of untranslatability in their commonalities and differences. Examining queerness in its relationship with a particular grammar, derived from a continuous (post)colonial history, challenges not only Eurocentric comparative practices, but crucially points towards an opening, 'something else', yet to be imagined.

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Notes

[1] See Hortense J. Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book' in *Diacritics*, 17:2, (1987), pp.64–81

[2] See Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007)

[3] See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, (New York: Grove Press, 2007)

[4] See Joan Anim-Addo, 'Gendering creolisation: creolising affect' in *Feminist Review*, 104, (2013)

[5] See Ann Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010)

[6] See Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, (New York: WW Norton & Co., 2019)

[7] See Achille Mbembe, 'Necropolitics' in *Public Culture*, 15:1, pp.11-40, (2003)

[8] See for example, Puar, Jasbir *Terrorist Assemblages*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007

[9] See Edelman, Lee, *No Future*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004)

[10] See Muñoz, José Esteban, Cruising Utopia, (New York: New York University Press, 2009)

[11] A body conventionally read as female, although as Spillers also highlights, how the 'female body' is 'made sense of' is not static or singular, depending on historical context.

[12] See Note 5.

[13] See for example, B.J Epstein and Robert Gillett ed., *Queer in Translation*, (London: Routledge, 2017); Brian J. Baer and Klaus Kaindl ed., *Queering Translation, Translating the Queer*, (London: Routledge, 2018)

[14] See for example, Duncan Large et al., *Untranslatability Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, (London: Routledge, 2019)

[15] See Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014)

[16] For an overview of the Caribbean's politics of homosexuality and miscegenation, see Smith, Faith ed., *Sex and the Citizen: Interrogating the Caribbean*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011)

[17] The novel is said to be modelled on the island of Trinidad, where Mootoo's parents are from.

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Rethinking Translation and Publication Politics: Dalit Writings in English Translation as World Literature

VANDANA L.

Power relations between different languages within India and of various Indian languages with English are ridden with inequalities. The process of translating Dalit literature from the vernaculars into English, hence, inevitably traverses these unequal power relations. Moreover, Dalit writings cut across disciplines and are essentially an inter-disciplinary area of research. It is argued that the question of addressivity, that is so crucial to Dalit Studies, is largely being resolved by translation (both within bhashas and from bhashas into English and other international languages). The construction of the literary international or World literature which is primarily through translation – with its assurance of global outreach and international participative reading – appears promising to the Dalit writings in English and English translation because it necessitates a rethinking of Indian history.

Other than the transposition of Source language to Target language and other linguistic technicalities like equivalence, negotiation, appropriation and adaptation, translation needs to be understood as a philosophical, political and cultural category. Andre Lefevere, a noted Translation theorist, significantly proposes three basic distinctions in approaching translation. First is to differentiate between the product (the translated text) and the process (the activity of translation); second is to choose between a descriptive (discursive) versus an evaluative (qualitative) approach; and the third pertains to deciding whether to analyze translations or translate oneself. Taking cue from Lefevere's theorization, this paper takes a discursive approach to translation and discusses English translation of Dalit writings as 'a product' with an interventionist potential.

This paper is divided into four sections, wherein in the first section, an attempt has been made to figure out the position of Dalit writings in English translation in the larger World literature paradigm. The worldwide circulation of Dalit Writings in translation, it is argued, is instrumental in deconstructing 'the idea of India' as a caste-free country. Dalit writings, especially autobiographies, necessitate a rethinking of Indian history. To this end, the first section of this paper engages with the contemporary debates pertaining to Translation Studies and World literature. I have also discussed a few critiques and counter-critiques of World Literature pertaining to canon politics and its Eurocentric approach, especially the importance it ascribes to the English language.

The second section of the paper discusses the Dalit response to English, which is significantly shaped by the politics of standardizing a select few vernacular Indian languages over their dialects, which mostly belong to the Dalits. Here, I discuss the case of a Gujarati Dalit writer, Neerav Patel and his critique of mainstream Gujarati literature, and also I discuss Kancha Ilaiah's views on how caste has its own grammar. The third section of the paper discusses the politics behind publishing—as to what role does publication of certain translations play in the service of certain ideologies, market forces, representational ethics, and questions like which text gets translated into which language and by whom, also which publication house publishes it—with special reference to the ongoing Dalit literary (largely vernacular) movement in India. Here, I also discuss a few cases of anti-caste publication ventures like Navayana and Panthers Paw. The last section of the essay discusses

the question of whether or not the 'truth value' of a Dalit text gets affected when it is translated by a non-Dalit/non-Indian translator?

I. Contemporary Approaches to Translation Studies and World Literature

Contemporary approaches to Translation Studies, like the Rewriting approach as proposed by Andre Lefevere and Theo Hermans, the Descriptive approach of Gideon Toury, or the Sociological approach of Pierre Bourdieu, reject the idea that translation is in any way inferior to the original. Translation is now rather seen as a discourse and perceived in its socio-cultural, historical and also national context. It is the recipient culture which is now the primary context of translation. Contemporary Translation Studies and World Literature, in fact, share these protocols.

The Rewriting Approach does not view translation merely as a verbal activity concerning linguistic equivalence, it rather views it in its historical and socio-cultural context. Lefevere understands translation as 'refraction', wherein refraction refers to the way a text travels from one language to another. This notion primarily focuses on how a work is adapted in a different language-culture influencing the target audiences, and hence, is significant to our understanding of World Literature. Lefevere's definition of translation as refraction sounds familiar to what David Damrosch notes about World Literature. Damrosch proposes that World Literature "encompasses all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language … a work only has an effective life as world literature whenever it is actively present within a literary system beyond that of its original culture." (2013: 199). One can, thus, infer how Translation Studies and World literature as disciplines, facilitate each other.

The Descriptive Approach, associated with Gideon Toury, a noted Israeli Translation theorist, refuses to evaluatively judge the quality of the translated text as good or bad rather perceives translation as a discourse. Toury conceptualized two translation strategies namely, source-oriented (one which is governed by the 'adequacy' principle) and target-oriented (one which is governed by the 'acceptability' principle). A source-oriented translation approach involves a formal approach to reproduce the linguistic structures and forms of source text. Its applicability, however, is difficult as no two languages are the same. Nonetheless, it is considered 'adequate', for an adequate translation complies with the source language structures. A translation aspiring absolute 'adequacy', for Toury, is 'unacceptable'. On the other hand, a target-oriented translation approach adapts to the cultural context of the target language. For Toury, this is an 'acceptable' translation—one where the requirements of the target reader are taken into consideration and one which enhances readability of the source text, while not strictly adhering to any rules pertaining to structural linguistics. The Descriptive approach, hence, encourages critics and theorists to 'describe' the phenomenon of translating and translation. The concept of 'equivalence' within Descriptive Translation Studies Approach is not prescriptive and a-historical, but historically situated, descriptive, variable, empirical and functional-relational (Toury 1995: 27). This approach suggests that the purpose of translation and its prospective readers should ideally be the two main considerations while reading or doing translations.

Recent studies in World Literature and Translation Studies have explored the relationship between the two. Both of these fields of study, for instance, have emerged with an idea to enable cross-communication across cultures, languages and time-periods. While David Damrosch, one of the pioneers of World literature, celebrates translation for enabling the concept of World literature, Emily Apter problematizes the equation shared between World literature and Translation Studies. Apter's complaint with the various models of World literature includes 'a translatability assumption'. The theory and method in World literature studies, Apter argues, blind-sights the 'untranslatable' and the 'incommensurable'.

Apter also questions the endorsement of the idea of cultural equivalence and substitutability inherent in the idea of World Literature. Apter differs from the belief marketed by the contemporary approaches to World literature that a Samuel Beckett text is equal to a text by Rabindranath Tagore, for instance. She makes a strong case for the 'creative failure' of translation and cultural and linguistic untranslatability. In his critique of Damrosch and arguing in line with Apter, Nicholas Harrison also states that all texts are governed by a notional inalterability and integrity that defies translation and/or paraphrasing.

Apter also observes that the project of canonizing World literature primarily through English translation, in an attempt to anthologize and curricularize world literary endeavors and cultural resources, is a Eurocentric and 'deflationary' gesture. Even for Aamir Mufti, although World literature is a global multi-lingual public literary sphere which, facilitated by translation, helps determine worldwide publishing practices, academic and 'elite' reading habits, one cannot overlook how only the authors promoting Eurocentric worldviews make it to the World Literature canon. Mufti goes on to state that "world literature was from the beginning an eminently orientalist idea." (36). As a response to this critique of World literature concerning eurocentrism, Damrosch suggests that World literature is always experienced within national contexts. World literature, he argues, only helps further develop national literary traditions.

Taking cue from Lefevere, Damrosch proposes that World literature is an 'elliptical refraction' of national literature(s). Contemporary approaches to World literature associated with theorists like David Damrosch and Franco Moretti, instead of seeing World literature as a fixed canon of texts perceive it as a mode of circulation and reading. Nonetheless, the canon of World literature puts English as a given medium of a global literary discourse. In a post-globalized scenario, where the English language and English translations are ascribed such a hegemonic status within the World literature canon, the question that arises here is whether a language like English can also serve counter-hegemonic purposes, as is the case with Dalit Studies, for instance.

II. The English Language and Dalit Empowerment: Understanding Politics of Language Standardisation and Heterogenous Mother Tongue(s) in India

Caste in India is heterogeneous in character and ridden with graded inequality. The location of the Dalit subject even about twenty years into the 21st C, accordingly, traverses from an urban-based educated middle class Dalit to a rural-based scavenger. Hence, to discuss Dalit writings in multilingual India as a homogenous archive is as problematic as homogenizing it in the English language through translation. As Rita Kothari notes that while caste experiences as documented in Dalit writings are trenchantly local in nature with region-specific registers, the English language has 'no memory of caste' (61). Kothari further observes that "Indian languages do not constitute for all Indians a proud inheritance, which "globalisation" and similar invasive forces may allegedly besiege. This is essentially an upper-caste view and luxury; those who wish to redefine themselves must do so by abandoning this inheritance and embracing English." (Kothari 2003, 65)

The Dalit response to English is precisely shaped by this argument. The hegemonic sections in India, like every other aspect, govern what is standard Indian language and what is not. The thus authorized standard language would obviously not reflect the speech/language of the unlettered and disempowered groups. The cultural difference prevalent between English and a non-standardized Dalit dialect in India, Kothari believes, is not more marginalizing than the latter's equation with an Indian language. Hence, any attempt by the hitherto disempowered to bridge the gap between their local registers and standard regional languages is almost equally challenging for them as espousing the much more promising English.

The literal translation of the Marathi term 'Dalit' in English is 'ground down' or 'grounded', which by implication, refers to the oppressed section of the society. The self-ascribed term 'Dalit', however, has ever since its inception meant to over-rule and replace the numerous derogatory terms like the Mahars and Mangs (in Maharashtra), the Parayars and Pallars (in Tamil Nadu), the Malas and Madigas (in Andhra Pradesh), and the Chandals (in West Bengal), designating sub-castes and graded inequality, that have existed in the Indian vernaculars since ages. The lack of a conceptual equivalent of 'dalitness' in non-Indian languages further problematizes the question of cultural untranslatability.

The concept of caste is alien to the English language. Despite the fact that English has remained a language of the privileged ever since its introduction in India, the non-privileged do yearn to learn it. In a study on the English language usage in academic spaces, "English is Here to Stay: A Critical Look at Institutional and Educational Practices in India", Vai Ramanathan observes that cultural and economical factors keep the Dalitbahujan-Adivasi students outside the exclusive, elitist and metropolitan knowledge sharing circles and classroom set-ups. Ramanathan notes that "the dalit and OBC students seem to struggle more than others. These are the students most in need of English yet English seems farthest from them." (228). Hence, if we perceive English as a casteless language and also as a language which is still not within the reach of Dalits, then one may ask how does it suit the Dalit cause? A doubt arises as to whether a language of the oppressors/colonizers, one that exhibits power, can articulate the fragmentation and resilience of the dispossessed? Can Dalit Writings in English translation prove as an illustration of counter-hegemonic and alternative use of the English language?

The English public sphere in India, although gradually increasing, given the vast population of the country is still small. In the absence of any other alternative, English is increasingly emerging, and significantly so, as a pan-India Dalit language connoting solidarity. The English language, Dalit thinkers argue, helps the Dalits do away with the hegemony of standard regional languages. Chanderbhan Prasad's admiration of Macaulay as is evident from his proclamation of Macaulay as the father of Indian modernity and Dalit empowerment, stems from Macaulay's historic 1835 decision to introduce English system of education in India. Prasad believes that Macaulay's insistence on English helped break the sovereignty of dominant classical languages like Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian. Renowned for his proclamation of the English language as a Mother Goddess to Dalits and the other marginalized sections, Prasad feels a philosophical and political affinity towards English, which the hegemonic castes in India have always felt towards Sanskrit. In a way, espousal of English is also significantly a refusal to bow down to the Sanskritic traditions and ideologies.

Any study taking into account translation of Dalit writings into English demands an addressal of the following concerns. Firstly, given that language is an identity marker; with differences in diction, vocabulary, syntax and accents, it helps identify a person's caste/class. Hence, the relationship between "standard" registers of regional Indian languages and the "non-standard" vernacular forms of those languages gives rise to linguistic exclusion. Secondly, one may ask whether or not a 'mother tongue' yields the same meaning for everyone. The construction and consolidation of the 'mother tongue', especially in a multilingual country like India, is a political act. For, by and large, it is the privileged few or the upper castes who happen to own the Sanskritized "standard" registers of vernacular Indian languages.

Given that languages are driven by hegemonic forces and desires, language acquisition by children from both the upper caste and DalitBahujan/Adivasi communities is determined by cultural, geographical and educational factors. The language of pastoralists, artisans, dalits and other dispossessed sections, as also noted by Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd in *Why I*

am Not A Hindu?, is inflicted with the materiality of location, occupation, everyday existence, which is mostly oral, production, labor related activities, memory and inheritance. This is how multiple languages exist within the same spectrum as the official/standard language. Ilaiah writes: "Caste language is structured by its own grammar. It is a flexible and alert grammar, designed for production-based communication. Though it has developed without the help of writing, it is no less sophisticated than 'standard' brahminical Telugu." (5-6).

The idea of even a mother tongue in India, hence, can never be homogenous. Caste based discrimination, also owing to the politics of standardization, plays a humongous role in alienating the Dalits from their standardized 'brahminical' mother tongues. In his article "Gujarati Maari Matrubhasha, English Maari Foster Mother", noting how English is a language of human rights and holds the potential of Dalit awakening in India, Neerav Patel, a renowned Gujarati Dalit writer, argues that if standard (sankritized) Gujarati is as alien and distant to the Dalits as English, it becomes imperative for the Dalits to instead embrace English as a 'foster-mother'. Patel believes that English not only offers a global reach and a vocabulary of human rights, but with no memory of caste, it does not legitimize and normalize caste.

The Dalit literary movement in Gujarat had continued to be sidelined till the late 1990s by the proprietors of mainstream Gujarati literature. The language politics concerning the use of standard Gujarati and non-standardized Gujarati Dalit dialects led to the dismissal of Dalit literary trends (at regional levels) on linguistic grounds. The use of Gujarati by people from the underprivileged, rural, illiterate sections or the less educated is deemed "inaccurate" compared to standard Gujarati. The thus-rising questions include the ones on power, representation and legitimacy which more often than not are governed by the privileged. How, then, would the lives of the dispossessed be represented and canonized within regional literatures? The politics concerning language standardization, hence, in a way validates the traditional Brahmanical politics of inclusion and exclusion.

III. The Publishing Market and Dalit Writings in Translation

Publication, translation and dissemination of a text, to use Pierre Bourdieu's theory, are governed by three factors, Field, Habitus and Capital. Bourdieu's sociological theory of translation and interpreting conceptualizes 'field' as the social milieu, 'habitus' as the dominant ideological worldview, and 'capital' as concerning finance, to be the three important factors governing agents of translation, i.e. the translators. Andre Lefevere perceives the ideological component as very crucial. A translator's own ideological leanings along with the ones imposed on him through patronage govern the activity of translation. Ideological politics and historical moments can affect the process of translation as well as the choice of the source text for translation. Accordingly, any representation of the subaltern is infused with power equations. Its writing in a vernacular and rewriting as translation indisputably reflects a certain ideological parlance. The interplay between power structures and ideological politics invariably influence translators and translations so much so that it may lead to preservation, perpetuation and also misappropriation of socio-cultural hierarchies.

The National Translation Mission launched in 2008 under the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Mysore, for instance, did not have any Dalit text at its onset. With such a huge population and wide ranging publication houses, India is one of the largest publishers in the world. The question to ask here is why/when did publishers in India start publishing Dalit writings in English? To be able to position Dalit writings in English translation on the world literary map and to understand if there has been any publishing pattern, however, it is important to know that the nature of publishing houses range from public to private and even independent.

The fact that higher education departments like Social Studies, English, Anthropology have begun to incorporate Dalit Studies as an emerging field of research has also affected its publication demand in the recent times. The publication industry, like any other industry, works on the demand and supply equilibrium. Even within Dalit Studies, hence, private commercial publication houses have commercial interests. The kind of books selected for publication by publishers like HarperCollins and Penguin, for instance, are largely commercial, academic or of general public interest. For instance, while commercial publishers go directly into the text, others like Sage, Orient Blackswan and Worldview offer detailed critical introductions.

The impact of the market forces along with the author, translator and publishers' efforts decide the reach of a text. The first ever Dalit memoir, Hazari's *Untouchable: The Autobiography of an Indian Outcaste*, for instance, was published in English by Frederick A. Praeger publishing house in America in 1951. The first ever Dalit anthology to be translated from Marathi into English was edited by Arjun Dangle, an acclaimed Dalit writer and one of the founding members of the Dalit Panthers. Published by Orient Blackswan in 1992, *Poisoned Bread* is a pioneering anthology of Marathi Dalit writings in English translation with a prefatory note by Gail Omvedt, followed by critical essays and speeches on the Dalit discourse.

Orient Blackswan, an Indian publishing company established in 1948, has published G. Kalyana Rao's *Untouchable Spring*, translated from Telugu by Alladi Uma and M. Sridhar in 2010.

Other popular titles published by them include *Dalit Personal Narratives* by Raj Kumar (first published in 2010) and *Dalit Literature and Criticism* by Raj Kumar (first published in 2019). The Oxford University Press has also lately picked up the fast emerging trend of publishing Dalit writings in translation. *Kusumabale*, a major classic in Kannada literature, originally published in 1988 and translated into English by Susan Daniel, became the first Dalit fiction to be published by the OUP in the year 2015. Thereafter, it has also published anthologies of Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam Dalit literary writings in English translation. Akhil Naik's first Oriya Dalit novel, *Bheda*, translated into English by Raj Kumar is also published by the OUP in 2017. Sheoraj Singh Bechain's autobiography *My Childhood on My Shoulders*, originally published in Hindi in 2009 and translated into English by Tapan Basu and Deeba Zafir was published by the OUP in 2018.

IV. Publishing with a Particular Ideology: Panthers Paw, The Shared Mirror, Navayana, Critical Quest

Yogesh Maitreya, a Dalit publisher and writer, runs a publication house called Panthers Paw Publications. Born in a Buddhist family in Nagpur (a place known for Ambedkar-led mass Dalit conversion to Buddhism in 1954), Maitreya describes his enterprise as not just a business organization but an anti-caste endeavor in publishing, which follows the footsteps of the Dalit Panthers and aims at building upon the still ongoing nation-wide Dalit movement. As a student at TISS, Maitreya realized the importance of strengthening the Dalit movement by creating a platform for publishing and dissemination of Dalit writings. Its first ever publication was J. V. Pawar's *Ambedkarite Movement After Ambedkar*, translated from Marathi by Maitreya himself. Pawar was one of the founding members of the Maharashtra based Dalit Panthers Movement which started in the 1970s. Having named the publication house after this movement reflects the ideology Maitreya is adhering and endeavoring to take forward.

In an article published by the digital media channel Scroll.in, noting his own position as a Dalit publisher, Maitreya notes: "I am a Dalit (not a fact that I wish to emphasise, but I want to make my position clear as a publisher). I am a first generation university–goer in

my family, the first person to get a doctorate. I have been working in English language publishing for four years now and I know what it means to publish stories, especially those which were deliberately erased from public consciousness." Some other titles published by the Panthers Paw include a collection of short stories *Flowers On the Grave of Caste* by Yogesh Maitreya, *We, the Rejected People of India* by Sunil Abhiman Awachar, translated from Marathi by Yogesh Maitreya, and *Days Will Come Back* by Kamal Dev Pall, translated from Punjabi by Rajinder Azad. *Broken Men: In Search of Homeland* is a collection of poems by Loknath Yashwant, translated by K. Jamamadas and Yogesh Maitreya. The front cover of the book has an intriguing photograph taken by a well-known Dalit photojournalist, Sudharak Olwe, who is the founder of a non-profit organization named Photography Promotion Trust (PPT). According to its website, the organization "uses the skills of photography to create definitive change in the lives of socially marginalized communities and promotes social documentary photography."

A few other mini publication ventures like Critical Quest (New Delhi), Siddhartha Books (Delhi) and Samyak Prakashan (New Delhi) publish abridged/short works and essays on socially relevant and often anti-caste themes. These short booklets are then sold at rates starting with as low as Rs 25 onwards. The intended reader of these booklets, hence, is certainly not the elite, unlike the case with Navayana is, for instance. Some of such titles published by Critical Quest include *Veda and Varna* by Brian K. Smith, Speeches at the Round Table Conference by B. R. Ambedkar, *Ambedkar on Nation and Nationalism* by G. Aloysius, *Slavery* by Jotirao Phule, *Marx on Culture* by Raymond Williams *Resurgent Buddhism* by Braj Ranjan Mani and several others. A section from the back cover of each of its publications by Critical Quest describes its founding principle as an "attempt to retrieve and sustain within current discourses the rational liberative articulation in history and culture. … The attempt is not profit oriented and invites co-operation and participation of all committed to socio-political transformation of the Indian societies towards greater social inclusion and more egalitarian social practice."

The spectrum of Dalit writings published over the last 60 years has followed a visible pattern. What started with the publication of memoirs and autobiographies, gradually shifted to creative, fictional works while presently culminating into critical, theoretical writings. For instance, books like Anand Teltumbde's *The Republic of Caste, Ambedkar and Other Immortals* by Soumyabrata Choudhury, *The Exercise of Freedom* by K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu, *Un/Common Cultures* by Kamala Visweswaran, *The Myth of the Holy Cow* by D. N. Jha, *Aryans, Jews, Brahmins: Theorizing Authority Through Myths of Identity* by Dorothy M. Fegueira published by Navayana Publishing Pvt Ltd. These books are undoubtedly taking further a discussion concerning caste and inequality on the level of theory. However, all of these publications are very expensive for the general public.

Graphic narratives like *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability—Incidents in the Life of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar* with art by Durgabai Vyam and Subhash Vyam, and story by Srividya Natarajan and S. Anand, *A Gardener in the Wasteland: Jyotiba Phule's Fight For Liberty* with story by Srividya Natarajan and art by Aparajita Ninan, and *No Laughing Matter: The Ambedkar Cartoons 1932-1956* are published by the Navayana. Since the graphic mode holds the potential to attract and influence people's imagination across all age groups, through sequential storytelling format, *Bhimayana* introduces Ambedkar not to the lower castes or the masses but is rather intended for the consumption of the privileged Indian metropolitan English-speaking bourgeoisie and international readers, and this is also reflected in its selling price. Other fictional works include translations like *Unclaimed Terrain* by Ajay Navaria, *Father May be an Elephant but Mother only a Small Basket* by Gogu Shyamala; and poetry collection titled *Give Us This Day A Feast of Flesh* by N. D. Rajkumar has also been published by Navayana.

Navayana publishing house started in 2003 by Ravikumar and S. Anand with an aim to publish works relating to anti-caste literary discourses in English. Initially it was a small enterprise based in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, but when afterwards Ravikumar stepped down, it now has its main office in New Delhi with S. Anand as the head. Navayana Pvt. Ltd. now extensively publishes exploring wide ranging fields within Dalit Studies. It is particularly famous for its annotated version of Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* with an introduction by an upper-caste writer, Arundhati Roy. The various controversies encircling this text are brought together in the form of a book titled *Hatred in the Belly*, published by The Shared Mirror.

The Shared Mirror Publishing House, another anti-caste publishing enterprise, has published books like *Hatred in the Belly: Politics Behind the Appropriation of Dr. Ambedkar's Writings, In Quest of Equality: Indian Constitution Since Independence, Bhima Koregaon: Our War Cry.* Its website describes itself as the following: "The Shared Mirror Publishing House aims to further the anti-caste discourse and is driven by a sincere desire to radically expand the horizons of Indian writing in English and other languages by providing a platform to a wide range of marginalized voices across the sub-continent."

Hatred in the Belly is an amalgamation of scholarly essays on the Brahminic appropriation of Ambedkar's seminal text, *Annihilation of Caste*. It discusses how Arundhati Roy's introduction of AoC strengthens the traditional notion of savarna intellectual hegemony. This is seen as an attack on Dalit discursive spaces with an attempt to curb and usurp Dalit literary imagination and empiricism.

V. Non/Dalit Translators and Retention of the 'Truth Value'

Linda Alcoff in "The Problem of Speaking for Others" addresses a pertinent question concerning 'who can and who should speak for whom?', one that lies at the heart of identitarian politics of all kinds. She offers an attentive insight into the ethics of representation while describing how 'context' is so important not only in deciphering meaning but also truth—*what* is said by *whom* and *how*? For Alcoff: "…truth is defined as an emergent property of converging discursive and non-discursive elements, when there exists a specific form of integration among these elements in a particular event. The speaker's location is one of the elements that converge to produce meaning and thus to determine epistemic validity" (82). In other words, location of the speaker, the context of what is being said where and whether what is being said is true or not determines the 'epistemic validity' of what is said.

It is argued that 'speaking' is not simply a matter of individual choice rather the act of speaking is one that carries with it a sense of responsibility and accountability. It is said that 'injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere'. To address injustice, Alcoff argues, even if it is about 'speaking for others' and however 'problematic' it be, is an act of responsibility. For the privileged, to 'retreat' from speaking for others only with the desire to rule out criticism, Alcoff reiterates, undercuts the political efficacy of the entire discourse of justice. If the 'others' in question are not in a position to 'speak' for themselves, the impetus to speak becomes even more crucial. Alcoff describes the notion of 'representational crisis' thus: "[In] both the practice of speaking for and the practice of speaking about others, I am engaging in the act of representing the other's needs, goals, situation, and in fact, who they are, based on my own situated interpretation. … In speaking for myself, I (momentarily) create myself—just as much as when I speak for others I create them as a public, discursive self, a self that is more unified than any subjective experience can support." (80)

Rita Kothari notes that the writers of Dalit autobiographies shoulder the burden of not just self-representation, but arguably act as translators of their communities. (Kothari 2003: 62). If a 'cultural other' (be it a non-Dalit or non-Indian) attempts to 'parachute'

into the lived reality of such a writer either through translation or a commentary, Guru and Sarukkai claim, it will never be 'authentic'. The idea of representation, hence, traverses multiple possibilities. In *Writing Culture: The Poetics of Politics of Ethnography*, Clifford and Marcus argue how even ethnographies are social constructions and lack any fixed truth value. The book discusses ethnographies as research involving 'inventions of cultures'. It argues how ethnic communities are not fixed in space and time. Since ethnography involves qualitative research based on reliable participant observation and/or experience, it is not an unambiguous representation of 'truth'. Clifford and Marcus develop on the insider/outsider dilemma of ethnography and discuss how challenging it can get for an insider to objectively approach a language, culture, ritual or a tradition. An insider ethnographer, as against an outsider, struggles with the idea of self-effacement to reconcile between the objective and subjective accounts.

However, language is a site of meaning construction and so is translation. Given the significance of English in the Dalit discourse, English translation inevitably holds the potential for enhanced visibility and dissemination. Spivak discusses translation as a possible site of constructing and articulating 'otherness'—oriental, sexual, subaltern. In "The Politics of Translation", she observes: "[i]n the act of wholesale translation into English, there can be the betrayal of the democratic ideal into the law of the strongest. This happens when all the literature of the Third World gets translated into a sort of with-it 'translatese', so that literature by a woman in Palestine begins to resemble, in the feel of its prose, something by a man in Taiwan. The rhetoricity of Chinese and Arabic! The cultural politics of high-growth, capitalist Asia-Pacific, and devastated West Asia! Gender difference inscribed and inscribed these differences." (qtd. in Venuti, 2000: 400). Here, Spivak raises concerns pertaining to the distortions English translations of Third World literature entails.

In another essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak problematizes the postcolonial discourse arguing how Post-colonial Studies adhere to re-inscription and cooptation of neo-colonial (institutionalized, male-privileged, first-world) ideological apparatuses of cultural erasure, economic exploitation and political domination. At a point, discussing the case of double marginalization, she notes: "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow." (Spivak, 1988:287). Spivak, here, points out how the subject position of a subaltern as a caste-oppressed Dalit/Dalitbahujan/tribal/woman is even more vulnerable to foreshadowing and silencing. Any translation of such a subaltern writing becomes problematic with myriad possibilities of cultural appropriations and political manipulations. The act of translation, hence, emerges as a site of power politics between the centre and the margin. It ceases to merely be linguistic, aesthetic and neutral, rather becomes cultural and political.

Discussing the case of a Dalit autobiography in translation, Christi Merrill also raises the question of 'double (in)fidelity' concerning firstly the generic category of atmakatha/autobiography (translating one's lived experiences into a language) and, secondly the activity of translation (translating from one language to another). Merill problematizes the assumption that ""insiders" are trustworthy translators of their own authentic experiences, and thus are verifiable sources of information about their lives." (131). Discussing the case of Om Prakash Valmiki's autobiography, *Jhoothan*'s English translation(s), she rather suggests that "this "insider's" experience is in part constructed by a series of outsider languages—not only the caste-based Hindi linguistic culture, but also Indian and American English – that posits an autobiographer in both the singular and the plural, an insider who can describe his life from the outside." (131).

Merill, here, warns us against essentializing a community experience – both at the linguistic and ethnographic level. Even while discussing an autobiography, for instance,

references to the 'Dalits' in the plural are non-negotiable. The early usage of the term 'Dalit' in the newly independent yet caste-bound India to denote a pan-India solidarity across regions, cultures and languages was clearly not meant for a homogenous group and certainly not singular. Also, Merill questions, if the nature of the 'truth' in question is one with a heterogenous history, then which fixed 'truth' value do we expect the auto-biographers and translators to adhere to?

The insider/outsider or the dalit/non-dalit debate concerning Dalit writings in India is already much discussed upon. While non-Dalits, owing to their privilege, are present within all prime locations in and outside academia, Dalit translators are even today not readily available. Given the descriptive contemporary approach to Translation Studies along with due adherence to translation ethics, translations of Dalit writings by 'cultural others' need not be abhorred rather should be welcomed. Even if there are mis-translations and mis-appropriations, it will still create a discursive space and offer a 'corrective' to the idea of India in the West.

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The (Many) Worlds of World Literature: Redefining World Literature in the Context of Untranslatability

ABHINABA CHATTERJEE

The concept of the 'untranslatability', popularised by Emily Apter in her 'Against World Literature' has proved to be a major force behind redefining the scope and the very concept of 'World Literature'. Theorists of postcolonialism have criticised translation's direction of traffic in World Literature, characterising it as a plundering of cultures that entrenched the global hegemony of the English language. The process both exoticised other cultures and created a false sense of equivalence between them, fetishising the appearance of alterity while erasing difference. Others objected to the commodification of literature for an elite market: the creation of an easily digestible World Literature canon, constructed by the academy, to attract a broader pool of fee-paying students. The phenomenon of World Literature, taught in the lecture hall via translations, seemed to validate Erich Auerbach's gloomy prediction that '*in a single literary culture … the notion of Weltliteratur would be at once realized and destroyed.*' This paper seeks to analyse how untranslatability, despite facing adverse criticism, has gone on to re-define the World Literature. Towards this, the paper will chart the relation between World Literature and Translation and elucidate the impact of untranslatability by defining the very perspectives from which it has influenced the concept. It will also analyse the adverse criticisms that the term 'untranslatability' has faced.

In 1967, R.K. Dasgupta gave World Literature a threefold definition that is useful for this discussion. First, World Literature can be "*the sum total of all the literatures of the world,*" a wide definition upon which the arguments of this article are based. Second, the term refers to "*works in the different literatures of the world which have attained world recognition*" (399). Dasgupta's second definition corresponds to prizewinning and in some cases bestselling literature, the literature that has jostled its way to the top of the literary system. And third, world literature can be viewed as "*different literatures of the world conceived as one literature*" and this is now the predominant meaning of the term (399).

In his famous "*What is World Literature*", David Damrosch defined 'World Literature' in terms of translation. Damrosch points out that translation play an important role in creating the category of 'world literature'. To the question 'Why should anyone read this motley assembly of texts?', Damrosch answers that he wants to trace 'what is lost and what is gained in translation, looking at the intertwined shifts of language, era, region, religion and literary context that a work can incur as it moves from its point of origin out into a new cultural sphere.' Apter's criticism of the advocacy of the translation process as a primary necessity of 'World Literature' is based on the essentially Anglo-centrism of the translation process. As Apter argues

> Both translation studies and World Literature extended the promise of worldly criticism, politicised cosmopolitanism, comparability aesthetics galvanized by a deprovincialised Europe, an academically redistributed area studies and a redrawn map of language geopolitics. Partnered, they could deliver still more: translation theory as 'Weltliterateur' would challenge flaccid globalisms that paid lip service to alterity while doing little more than to buttress neoliberal 'big tent' syllabi taught in English.

World literature for Damrosch is not about canon, but rather a mode of circulation and of reading by means of translation, especially in the West. Some countries have less contact with the West, and thus the chance of translation is rare, though one may find works of astonishing beauty and high quality. Damrosch emphasized that "*reception of texts has to do with the American interests and needs than with genuine openness to other cultures*" (18). Based upon this, the scope of world literature is still restricted, and Damrosch rightly articulated that "*foreign works will barely be translated at all unless they reflect American concerns and fit comfortably with American images of the foreign culture in question*" (18). This is one of the strong points that Damrosch presented in his book. Some writers, as it is known, in order to attain international fame, align themselves with western ideologies to achieve their purposes. They sometimes work against the interest of their nations, denouncing their cultures as well as religions in an attempt to attract the western secular view. Damrosch emphasized that "*we need to look closely at the ways a work becomes reframed in its translations and its new cultural contexts*" (24). World Literature, according to him, is constituted very differently in different cultures. For example, World Literature in Brazil has long been shaped by a different set of forces. As he maintained, "*Even a genuinely global perspective remains a perspective from somewhere, and global patterns of the circulation of world literature take shape in their local manifestations*" (27). Addressing the issue of translation "what is lost and what is gained", Damrosch made it clear that "*we can gain a work of world literature but lose the author's soul*" (36). However, he later indicated that works gain in translation. In the preface to the 6-volume *Longman Anthology of World Literature*, translation functions, they say, "not so much by mirroring and reflecting an unchanged meaning, as by refracting it, in a prismatic process that can add new highlights and reveal new facets in a classic text" (Damrosch and Pike, 2009: xxv). but the obvious objection is that one may equally well say that old facets and highlights may be lost or obscured. To tip the balance in favour of gains in translation, Damrosch has two main lines of argument. The first concerns the usual meaning of the phrase "to gain in translation", that is, broadly, that the translation of a given text is somehow preferable to the original. Damrosch's other line of argument for "gains in translation" is pursued more extensively but not, to my mind, more compellingly. He writes: "works become world literature when they gain on balance in translation, stylistic losses offset by an expansion in depth as they increase their range" (289). So here it is accepted in passing that there may be "stylistic losses", but these disadvantages are outweighed, it is asserted, by "an expansion in depth" as texts "increase their range". What this comes down to, as far as I can see, is that translated texts gain readers, and get interpreted in new ways, outside their own linguistic sphere. This is indeed a good thing, if the text is worth reading, but it is an odd way to use the phrase "gains in translation"; to me it seems a bit like describing a book's argument as wide-ranging on the basis that you had the book in your backpack when you went on holiday. In any case, any writing would "gain in translation" in that broad sense, which therefore cannot help define and delimit "world literature". Clearly there are interesting things to say about certain books' afterlives, in the original and in translation, across different cultures, as Damrosch's own work demonstrates. But I do not see how that amounts to a claim for what Damrosch calls an "expansion in depth" when texts are translated. And none of this addresses the concerns of those who think that literary texts tend to lose in translation, or to be "untranslatable".

The creation of nation states in Europe in the nineteenth century went hand in hand with the emergence of the idea of a transnational literature where translation was an important tool of transmission and exchange. It was believed that translation could foster dialogue and understanding between nations that cultural mediation could compensate for the arrogance, intolerance and ethnocentrism of the nation state. For instance, Thomas Carlyle in his 1827 essay on the state of German literature remarks that it has the best, as

well as the most translations because "*the Germans study foreign nations in a spirit which deserves to be oftener imitated. It is their honest endeavor to understand each, with its own particularities, in its own special manner of existing; not that they may praise it, or censure it, or attempt to alter it, but simply that they may see its manner of existing as the nation itself sees it, and so participate in whatever worth or beauty it has brought into being*" (70). In this scheme of things translation comes to carry a heavy burden, as instanced by Antoine Berman's often-quoted idea of translation as a decentering force, as an escape route from ethnocentrism: "*the essence of translation is to be an opening, a dialogue, a cross-breeding, a decentering. Translation is a 'putting in touch with,' or it is nothing*" (Berman 4). This statement might seem unduly optimistic today and yet it is a breath of fresh air for the literatures of Europe where each one has evolved from a nationalistic base. Further, the belief that translation fosters dialogue underlies many discussions of the subject. A few have questioned it. Douglas Robinson, for example, has drawn attention to a metanarrative of postcolonial translation studies whereby cultures are seen to progress through certain stages: the precolonial state, the colonial state, the postcolonial state, and a future decolonized state (89-90). It is often assumed that decolonization leads to more translation, although this is not necessarily the case. Translation is important for the creation of World Literature, but fades into the background once this ambition is achieved. Mona Baker has questioned the metaphor of bridge building in translation in her study of how translation can prevent dialogue, block contacts, and support ethnocentrism on a global scale in the so-called war on terror. Already in the early-twentieth century, supranational attempts to redeem political divisions between nation states through translations of literature were inevitably connected to politics. The attainment of "world recognition," as in Dasgupta's second sense, was not without controversy. The Nobel Prize in Literature helped to promote the idea of an ideal library of all the countries of the world, a kind of United Nations of literature and Werner Friedrich called the Nobel a sort of "NATO of literature," but a literary version that only contains in fact a quarter of the NATO nations (Friedrich qtd. in Damrosch 1).

Any discussion of World Literatures in the post-colonial scenario requires a cultural-political perspective. The resurgence of world literature and its opposition to postcolonial literature has ignited vigorous debates. While some scholars have publicly confronted contentious claims of Postcolonial Studies' dwindling scholarship in an era of Globalization Studies, Translation Studies, and World Literature—Baidik Bhattacharya's *Postcolonial Writing in the Era of World Literature*; Amir Mufti's *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literatures*; and Chantal Zabus's *The Future of Postcolonial Studies*, come to mind—others have privately exchanged their defense in their classrooms or on paper. Whether against world literature's veritable erasure of the (postcolonial) Other, or its unassuming rendering of a Europe-centered perspective, its coeval rebirthing and mission to replace postcolonial literature is a self-mystifying hyperbole that generates distortions of its appearance versus its essence. In world literature's attempt to be an exemplary substitute to postcolonial literary criticism, it has avoided its own representational claims. The opposition between World Literature and postcolonial literature is deeply problematic in its entrenchment of how opposition is secured and validated. Difference is necessary, almost injunctive to growing as a scholar, while rekindled suspicion and passion are entertaining in theoretical debates.

The disciplinary relationship of World Literature to various disciplines fails to address the hindrances posed by untranslatability, which Emily Apter invokes as "*a deflationary gesture toward the expansionism and gargantuan scale of world-literary endeavors*" (Apter: 2013, 3). Apter engages in a polemical critique of recent efforts to revive World Literature models of literary studies (Moretti, Casanova, etc) on the grounds that they construct their curricula on an assumption of translatability. As a result, incommensurability and what Apter calls the "untranslatable" are insufficiently built into the literary heuristic.

Drawing on philosophies of translation developed by de Man, Derrida, Sam Weber, Barbara Johnson, Abdelfattah Kilito and Eìdouard Glissant, as well as on the way in which "the untranslatable" is given substance in the context of Barbara Cassin's *Vocabulaire europeìen des philosophies: Dictionnaire des intraduisibles*, the aim is to activate 'Untranslatability' as a theoretical fulcrum of Comparative Literature with bearing on approaches to world literature, literary world systems and literary history, the politics of periodization, the translation of philosophy and theory, and the bounds of non-secular proscription and cultural sanction.

In post-colonial debates, the difference of cultures and literatures has become the leading term. The deconstructionist concept of translation has been related to historical reality: deconstructionist rejection of fixed referential meaning and clearly defined organic cultural entities in favour of process and of the identical in favour of otherness, have had an important impact on the conceptualization of intercultural transfer, intellectual confrontation and translation. Cultures are no longer regarded as homogeneous monads, but as refracted by constructions of alterity and also by their blending of foreign cultures.

"World literature" is as heavily freighted as any of Apter's Untranslatables, and many of its common usages have only slight relation to literary texts. It has worked historically to map the lines of inheritance—cultural and otherwise—that separate high from low, smart from dumb, timeless from temporary, haves from have-nots. We can agree, then, that poetry may stand emblematically for that which is particularly hard to translate, or "impossible" in some sense that is not exactly metaphorical, and also that, nevertheless, tellingly, quite a lot of poetry does, in fact, get translated, and translated well, and published and read in translation. This seems to suggest, contrary to what Damrosch implies at the end of that last quotation, that it is not "translatability" that decides what gets translated. Indeed, untranslatability, or the "impossibility" of translation, clearly attracts some translators, and may help make of their translations compelling creative works (that may or may not get published, read, or studied). Besides many translations of poetry, another striking example would be the translation of Perec's *La Disparition*, a novel from which the letter e, usually the most common in French, is entirely absent. For a writer such as Perec, the self-imposed lipogrammatic constraint is seen as productive, in the same way that the constraints of rigid verse forms may promote a poet's creativity and produce innovative effects for the reader. For prospective translators of *La Disparition* (literally "The Disappearance"), the constraints of translation, on top of the ferocious constraint of the lipogram, must have a similar appeal. Besides Gilbert Adair's acclaimed English translation, whose title, *A Void* (1994), is already an impressive accomplishment, there are unpublished English translations and, as Wikipedia (n.d.) points out, translations into Dutch, German, Italian, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish. The "untranslatable" is exactly what some people feel the urge to translate; and being untranslatable need not stop a text from travelling, in translation, around the world. When Goethe invoked *weltliteratur* in the early nineteenth century, it was to imagine how German poetry would supersede other nations' to become "the universal possession of mankind, revealing itself everywhere and at all times in hundreds and hundreds of men." That assertion of the global value of local goods was built into *weltliteratur* from the start, and Karl Marx borrowed the term decades later to theorize the economic value Goethe implied. For Marx, world literature was a cultural effect of economic compulsion, a testimony to the market imperative that "chases the bourgeoisie over the surface of the whole globe," compelling them to "nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere."

At a mundane linguistic level, untranslatability is a familiar phenomenon. It is the most common reason for one language to borrow a word from another: we didn't have an English word for *pizza*, so we imported the Italian one. Modern English has absorbed such a large number of words from other languages that those derived from its Anglo-

Saxon base are a minority, outnumbered by borrowings from French alone. It is startling to realise that when we talk about *God* or the *gods*, we are using a word that was, initially, considered sufficiently untranslatable that the Germanic ancestor of the English language had to borrow it from a non-Indo-European linguistic substratum about which we know little – perhaps the same language from which we derive *folk*, another word without a convincing Indo-European etymology.

Untranslatability arises because of the cultural differences between the people speaking the original language text and those speaking the language of the target language text. Kinship terms are created in social and cultural context of a language hence differs from language to language. In India, there is more specification of kinship terms than English, e.g. in Marathi 'Mama' is 'mother's brother' and 'Kaka' is 'father's brother' but in English, there is only 'uncle' for both terms. Accurate translation of kinship terms is very difficult: 'Because kinship terms articulate a specific structure which is, if at all, only minimally shared between different societies, putting them into English immediately confronts the writer with doubts about translatability'. As Rosman and Rubel explain, the first difficulty arises when collecting information on kinship terms, especially if English prompts are used. For example, the word for 'father's sister's son' may elicit the local language translation of 'father's sister's son' rather than the lexical item which would be used for this category in the local language itself. It is also problematic to translate categories into English categories which are quite differently structured.' (Sturge 21). Each and every language has its own terminology of emotions to express and most of the time such terms cannot be translated. There is again, differentiation among languages regarding sex/ taboo terms:

> 'And therefore many well-documented cases of sex-related differences in the literature, which do not necessarily reflect the same attitudes towards social status or male and female roles as do the sex-related differences that exist in our own society. The relation between language-variation and its social correlates is such that broad generalizations in terms of variables like sex, age and social class soon give way, in particular instances, to more detailed and more interesting statements which make reference to the structure of different societies and to the attitudes (i.e. to the culture) of their members.' (Lyons 274).

> The process of translation, therefore, entails a reading that creates endless possibilities of production of meanings, by translating the 'traces' in the 'source text', which is the absent part of the sign's presence, the sign left by the absent thing, after it has passed on the scene of its former presence. Every present, in order to know itself as present, bears the trace of an absent which defines it. It follows then that an originary present must bear an originary trace, the present trace of a past which never took place, an absolute past. In this way, Derrida believes, he achieves a position beyond absolute knowledge. According to Derrida, the trace itself does not exist because it is self-effacing. That is, in presenting itself, it becomes effaced. Because all signifiers viewed as present in Western thought will necessarily contain traces of other (absent) signifiers, the signifier can be neither wholly present nor wholly absent. This is similar to other kinds of creative writing. (Chatterjee, 2020)

While the theorists of World Literature, especially David Damrosch, insist on translatability of a text, and its subsequent translation, as an essential feature of the texts (in the sense of Stanley Fish), the element of resistance and their susbequent untranslatability, cannot be negated as per the poststructural and postmodern definition of translatability. Derrida, in his reading of Benjamin, has defined translation in terms of 'afterlife'. He defines the translated text as a creative work that resituates the 'sacred original' in the target language and culture. Thus, keeping in view the definition of World Literature by David Damrosch and the definition of translation offered by Derrida, it can be argued that untranslatability, not in the sense of a lack of tension between textuality and its translation, but by its endless potential of resisting the process of translation, simultaneously resists and ensures the survival of the 'sacred original' in the target language and culture.

Thus world literature needs to happen — as it were — along the following lines: "Setting up a comparative transcultural history of literature that would present its own theoretical limitations and fallacies but would simultaneously offer an effective and understandable assessment of the topic at hand (literary influence, period styles, revolutionary trends, global currents and convergencies, etc.), and thereby would reconcile the dangerous and cautionary aspects of theory with the need to maintain a disciplinary endeavor (the writing of a literary history, no matter how it is defined, be it in national, comparative, or global terms) presents a task that is both daunting and fraught with pitfalls" (Sucur 95). Along the various types of choices — personal, communal, national — which motivate translation, interpretation, and dissemination there are two seemingly opposite situations: in the first the translator selects texts similar to his/her own culture and which are easy for readers at home to understand and in the second the translator selects texts which are different from his/her own native culture, but which he/she sees as pivotal for the cultural development of his/her own nation. In the former situation it is relatively easy for readers to understand and accept texts. In the latter greater obstacles and resistance might be encountered. However, in each case the text needs to go through the filtering of the national culture.

Different from the selection mechanisms within national literatures, the selection processes in world literature and translated literature occurs across cultural and language barriers: "The foreign text is not so much communicated as inscribed with domestic intelligibilities and interests. The inscription begins with the very choice of a text for translation, always a very selective, densely motivated choice, and continues in the development of discursive strategies to translate it, always a choice of certain domestic discourses over others" (Venuti 468). This means that texts in translation always lose something with regard to source texts, but they also gain something, mainly the right to go beyond the boundaries of their own nationalities and to be read and understood in other national contexts. This also means that a national literature does not enter the literary territory of other nations instantly. As long as it is translated, there will certainly be problems regarding re-writing, variation, and misreading, and all forms of cultural variation: world literature is an "an elliptical refraction of national literatures … that gains in translation … not a set canon of texts but a model of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time" (Damrosch, What Is 281). The so-called "elliptical refraction" is different from simple reflection: if a person stands in front of an even mirror, then the image in the mirror is a simple reflection of this person's image, but if this person stands in front of an uneven mirror, the image will be deformed into an elliptical refraction. National literature and world literature enable such elliptical refractions rather than simple reflection and since world literature is related to both source and target literature, this refraction is "double" in nature. An elliptical shape is formed in the overlapping dual zone of the source culture and the receiving culture: world Literature is produced in this middle ground associated with both cultures and not limited to any one part alone.

I posit that it is not enough to talk about cultural variation in terms of World Literature. It is not only necessary to stress specificity and distinctiveness, but also commonality, generality, and cultural convergence. It is not only necessary to talk about unidirectional variation, but also bidirectional and multidirectional variation. World literature refers to national literature that can transcend the specificity of the nation–state's cultural boundaries and ascend to the common where it can be read and understood by the readers of other cultures representing both, unity between specificity and commonality, and variation and convergence: "A national literature poses all the questions. It must signal the self-assertion of new peoples, in what one calls their rootedness, and which is today their struggle. That is its sacralizing function, epic or tragic. It must express — and if it does not (and only if it does not) it remains regionalist, that is moribund and folkloric — the relationship of one culture to another in the Diverse, its contribution to totalization. Such

is its analytical and political function which does not operate without calling into question its own existence" (Glissant 252).

In conclusion, we have to say that without detecting and dealing with cultural untranslatability, translators may fail to convey the naturalness or even the source text true intention. Because cultural untranslatability is not applicable to all language combinations, the concept may be insignificant to translators or translation scholars who work in a language combination that involves no or only a marginal cultural difference. Depending on the local notion of correctness peculiar to the socio-cultural context; however, some translations can indeed be incompatible with the target language text. Finally, it must be observed that translating such culturally untranslatable items entails sufficient knowledge about the culture, demanding sensible approaches by translators.

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Figuring out the Untranslatable: Traces of Twombly

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Abstract: The intertwining of languages, such as writing and visual expression, can enrich our understanding of the translation process and also its limits and obscure areas – the untranslatable. Visual art can therefore become a fruitful resource for an inquiry into translation. Accordingly, an artist like Cy Twombly, one of the most literary visual artists, can provide clues about the enigmas of translation or at least attempt to uncover them in the form of images. Twombly includes words and phrases in his paintings with various degrees of legibility from a great diversity of writers, along with spots and scribbles that are not part of any code. All of this reveals a way of evoking texts and stories covering a wide range of different cultural groups although predominantly classic.

The poet Octavio Paz recognized in Twombly the attributes of a "universal translator". It is also this path that we will explore and put to test in Twombly's work but just to a certain extent, in which the search for universality becomes a myth, impossibility, or incomprehension. As Ricoeur says in his study on translation "we know that no universal language can be able to reconstruct its undefined diversity" (Ricouer 2005, 45).

Twombly's poetic dimension is probably not universal from the point of view of a perfect language but through the vagueness of the writing in his paintings, which leaves room for imagination and challenges the translation process. "Poetry, and not just poetry, but nature – seasons, vegetation – all of this is transformed, translated into image" (Paz 1995, 182).

Keywords: Writing, Cy Twombly, image, translator, visual arts

Art as an Inquiry

Can images and the visual arts help us to enrich our understanding of the translation process? The creative act, regarding the pictorial, can it enrich that complex process at the heart of language called translation? The answer is yes, and that is the goal of this text: to take as a starting point the visual expression of an artist, Cy Twombly, with the purpose of analyzing the theme of translation and the untranslatable in a singular approach.

The decision to search in the visual arts and in its "language" a way to enrich the concept of translation corresponds to understand it beyond the conventional sense of transposing written or spoken text from one language to another. In our proposal, we refer mainly to translation in its metaphorical sense. This perspective combines perceptions from different domains, for instance, when we state that the perception of nature, or the reading of a poem can be translated into the image of a painting or drawing.

Twombly's work not only conceives metaphorical translations into images but also captures our attention to the untranslatable in a unique way. His pictorial language reveals a universality open to multiple observers able to translate the world in its diversity. This sort of universality differs from uniformity and mundialization which abolish differences. The position of Twombly becomes more clear regarding this matter, if we consider the various cultural references that appear in this work. The artist seems to put forward images and compositions which combine a series of perceptions and testimonials, together with geographical and temporal contexts but mostly literary and mythological issues.

From Possible Readings to the Untranslatable

At first Twombly's paintings invite an attempt to read the fragments of writing that occasionally appear in his canvases. Although, to decipher or interpret those writings is not actually the purpose of the paintings, or at least it is not its main intent. The fact that the degrees of legibility may vary favors this argument. Moreover, we can question ourselves if the erudite references to literature, poetry and classical antiquity that often appear in his paintings may suggest a certain elitism and ask for an erudite public. However this is far from the truth, Twombly uses the texts mostly as a motivation for himself. As an artist in love with poetry, the poetic text suggests directions to explore in painting: "Sometimes I like that a title gives me impetus or direction for the path I intend to pursue" ("Paroles d'artiste – Cy Twombly" 2019, 19). In short, whether the sentences are actually legible is not as important as its role as a catalyst for Twombly to penetrate the poetic sense these texts originally inspire. More than the desire to read a complete poem, the viewer is confronted with an untranslatable aesthetic experience, overflowing the text and immersing the viewer in a pictorial composition.

The words come to light dispersed in the paintings, and the lines of the verses sometimes appear in a cascade, in certain points legible in others replaced by a stain or transformed into lines, fused with the painting.

The references to culture are actually just an outcome of Twombly's close relationship to literature and writing. Besides, for this reason, Twombly's process of translation into images is unique and the books and narratives seem to follow the artistic process in an organic way, impregnating the very fabric of the work "I never really separated painting and literature because I've always used references" (Jacobus 2016, 5).

The possibility of reading the words on paintings is thus something that remains open and varies according to the artworks and the receiver itself, moreover the most penetrating reading of this writing is the one leading to the language of the image, having as an outcome a sort of an ambiguous process of translation.

So there's uncertainty regarding our position in face of these artworks, since their rich content give rise to different reactions, as the artist Brice Marden testifies "I'm puzzled when I watch people looking at these paintings: they don't seem to be reading the writing. I find that reading it really informs the rest of the image, to the point where the way he works it, becomes so much a part of the image" (Varnedoe 1995, 172).

If we consider the content of the writings in the artwork in regard to the original book references, the viewer experiences the words and references of Twombly already transformed by the artist, and "translated" with a logic of his own, not always claiming a legibility in order to capture an emotion expressed in the untranslatable dimension of poetry:

"I like poets because I can find a condensed phrase...My greatest one to use was Rilke, because of his narrative, he's talking about the essence of something. I always look for that phrase" ("Paroles d'artiste – Cy Twombly" 2019, 32). So let's add a remark, although knowledge of the written references is not essential, they can still open the artwork to a reading of a different nature, more in tune with the meaning of the inscriptions.

As Roland Barthes pointed out about Twombly "When writing Virgil on the canvas, it is as if Twombly summed up in his hand all the greatness of this Virgilian world, everything that this name symbolizes" (Barthes 1984, 155) even if this ability for evocation can be mocked by some critics (for instance, in Robert Hughes' text on Twombly[1]), it is important to retain here an aspect that seems clear to us, and that Barthes also calls our attention to (in his famous essay in late 70's, that helped, at the time, to place Twombly among the greatest artists of his generation):

The titles of the artworks or the words and phrases written on Twombly's canvases do not necessarily tell us what the canvas represents, that is, we do not easily recognize, at

least, representative elements of that title in the artwork. For instance, on Twombly's painting "The Italians", Barthes tells us that you shouldn't look for Italians except in their name. Barthes questions:

> "The Italians? Sahara? Where are the Italians? Where is the Sahara? Let's look for them. Of course, we find nothing. Or at least – and here begins Twombly's art – what we find – namely the painting itself, the Event, in its splendor and enigmatic quality – is ambiguous: nothing "represents" the Italians, the Sahara, there is no analogical figure of these referents; and yet, we vaguely feel, there is nothing, in these paintings, which contradicts a certain natural idea of the Sahara, the Italians. In other words, the spectator has an intimation of another logic (his way of looking begins to operate transformations): although it is very obscure, the painting has a proper solution, what happens in it conforms to a telos, a certain end" (Barthes 1984, 158).

This hermetic "logic" that Barthes identifies in Twombly reveals that the artist translates titles and phrases into images without following an illustrative or representative scheme of the references. According to Barthes, this unusual logic has something labyrinthic, finally leaving a kind of trail or a ghostly impression that pervades the canvas. We also recognize in this way of approaching the poetic, something untranslatable dispersed in traces that sometimes result from attempts or approximations also characteristic of Twombly's process. Many inscriptions and poems seem faded or blurred by layers of white paint, with new words and strokes added again in a sort of palimpsest.

The Untranslatable as Image and Trace

The translation that Twombly operates during his image construction is therefore not an analogy based on similarity or representation, but rather a metaphorical analogy of the order of resonance, in which different languages communicate and overlap, through themes and meanings but without a full equivalence, and far from a literal translation.

It is difficult, however, to sustain that nothing of the order of representation is present in some paintings, and in fact Twombly's work comprises several episodes in which the relations between writing and figurative traces establish variable combinations, sometimes intersecting as in the series of "Four Seasons", or superimposing and condensing a message, as in the work "Achilles' Revenge", a painting in which a bloody triangle appears, which can be read as the blade of a Trojan war hero's weapon, or an A of Achilles. Twombly describes this "emblematic sign" as follows: "I wanted this, the A for Achilles. I always think of A as Achilles" (Lequeux 2016, 35).

Still on the realm of the Trojan War, we can follow Eliza Holland's recent analysis of Twombly's series of paintings "50 days in Iliamo". In her text, Eliza identifies Twombly's "attempts to translate the passion of Homer's epic into painting" (Holland 2020, 1). However, it is curious how the approximation between the reference text and Twombly's paintings cannot in fact be based on demonstrative thinking, since once again it is not a question of deciphering, or as the artist R.Serra once pointed out about Twombly, an analysis of his writing cannot lead us to anything literal[2]. Possibly, by reaching a similar conclusion, Eliza Holland considers that "if such knowledge or classicist's explanation of the paintings were required, Twombly has failed in his mission to "translating" Homer" (Holland 2020, 10). Also acknowledging the well-known aversion of Twombly to talk about his work or reflecting on it. Indeed her approach seems to confirm that his paintings retain something untranslatable and unthinkable that we also find in literary work *"so, in many ways, his paintings will always be enigmatic, imbued with the complexity and ambiguity of the Iliad itself"* (Holland 2020, 10).

This sort of poetry secret language, inaccessible in its last stronghold to translation, is in turn also signalled by Mary Jacobus, in her book about poetry in the paintings of Twombly.

In particular, in a section where she discusses the late paintings inspired by the sonnets of Rilke's Orpheus, and in which the theme of the rose is worked with an effervescent energy that explores the lush flow of paint, the author recognizes a common aspect between Rilke and Twombly, so far as both make use of a language that the observer has not yet mastered, but which invites him to read, even though it bars the passage to its interior. As the author points out:

> "these themes [of Rilke's poems] are signalled [in Twombly's paintings] by the inscriptions that occupy the right hand margins of Twombly's Roses paintings, gesturing towards what cannot be seen or easily unpacked, including the invisible painter and the paradoxical privileged inner eye. The poem that addresses the rose resembles it because it too can´t be completely translated; each requires immersion in darkness and possesses a secret language" (Jacobus 2016, 222-223).

Despite these barriers, the unthinkable and untranslatable can be contemplated in images that ascend to the surface of Twombly's canvases, not through a reading but through the almost physical experience of writing turned into image, which discovers in the trace (lignes and spots, deployed in the canvas) an intermediate space of transaction between written and visual languages, each in its own way sometimes plunging into the domain of the unfathomable, by the hand of poets and artists.

A Path, Twombly as an Universal Translator

It is worth clarifying what sort of translation process into images actually takes place on Twombly's canvases. The poet Octavio Paz at one point used the name "universal translator" to describe Cy Twombly's creative process. Nobel prize-winner, poet Octavio Paz also has an important work as an art and literature critic, and this expression "universal translator" is a term he used before in the context of the essay "Baudelaire as Art Critic: Presence and Present" . In an interview with Paz in 1995, conducted by John Harvey, on the occasion of a retrospective of Twombly's work in the Menil Collection, Paz considers that "the Baudelarian sense of "universal translator" applies to Twombly in a very particular and precise way. Poetry, and not only poetry but nature – seasons, vegetation – all this is transformed, translated into the image" (Paz 1995, 182).

In the essay on Baudelaire, Octavio Paz introduces his specific concept of translation, in a context where he begins quoting Baudelaire's first essay on the visual arts, a text in which the idea of painting as an autonomous language stands out. Moreover, Octavio Paz adds that "the idea of language includes the idea of translation: the painter translates the world into visual images" in turn, "the critic is a poet who translates lines and colours into words. The artist is a universal translator" (Paz 1986, 51). Paz also considers that "this translation is a transmutation" (Paz 1986, 51). The meaning of this type of translation is therefore a two-way process, from non-linguistic signs to linguistic signs or the reverse. When speaking of transmutation Octavio Paz means that these translations ultimately result in new works and not mere copies, they are metaphors of the original. More than translations in the strict sense in a confined universe, Paz speaks of analogies between "languages" from different fields (painting, music, literature...), terms and comparisons that are retrieved from Baudelaire[3].

Metaphor and wonders of the analogy

The analogy described by Octavio Paz deserves special attention since it reveals a unique sort of translation, as his essay states:

> "Analogy is the highest function of imagination, since it fuses analysis and synthesis, translation and creation. It is knowledge of and at the same time transmutation of reality" (Paz 1986, 59).

In Paz's words, this analogy allows for a variety of correspondences, operating not only in cognitive terms but also in creative ones. This would be the key to bring into dialogue different temporal and spatial moments, together with various artistic languages and a creative pratice that this ambitious operation requires. In this procedure we can already recognize a vehicle for translations and correspondences that are difficult to establish, with the purpose of accessing works, images and figures that would otherwise be elusive and untranslatable in an impoverished sense. It is a maneuver of this kind that Paz also discovers in Twombly when he recognizes in him a universal translator in painting, like Baudelaire in poetry. At the heart of this artistic faculty, the analogy would begin by :

> "articulate all times and all spaces in an image which, ceaselessly changing, prolongs and perpetuates itself. In a second instance, it transforms communication into creation: what painting says without telling, turns into what music paints without painting, and what – without ever expressly mentioning it – the poetic word enunciates" (Paz 1986, 59).

Therefore, we recognize an untranslatable which can evoke equivalents in the different arts, but does not uncover itself beyond the metaphorical sense. It is this part of the message, whose proliferation of meaning is irreducible to a literal translation, that Cy Twombly's work contributes to make us aware. Therefore, Twombly's painting is close to this modern sense of the analogy that Paz identifies in the artist as a universal translator.

Experiences of this sort, regarding creative "translation" between poetry and painting praised by Octavio Paz in Twombly's creation, favoured a joint project between the two of them. This project, a collection of eight poems by Octavio Paz was bound together with drawings by Twombly. Our interpretation of Octavio Paz primary interest and attraction to the work of Twombly can benefit from hearing in Paz's own words how he understands the artistic process of this painter:

> "[his gesture is] a movement between the oral and the visual. Twombly captures this in his technique, which is new, alluding to the passing of time. Sometimes you see his inscriptions, figures and colors, like something that time has erased, but not entirely; you can see, you can guess, you can imagine" (Paz 1995, 182).

This explanation seems to testify what we have already been suggesting, namely that in this paintings meanings are not completely static, there is a fluctuation of meaning that opens up the realm of imagination.

If we go back to Paz's critical essays and once again to the text concerning Baudelaire, Octavio Paz develops this idea of a creative process that converts poetry into images or vice versa, which he calls analogue translation. This process, as in Twombly's canvases, in which images and phrases cross with various associations, also escapes a univocal meaning, favoring the dispersion of the readings and content.

> Unlike the medieval artist who had only one code, writing, "the modern artist has a repertoire of heterogeneous signs and, instead of sacred texts, confronts a multitude of contradictory books and traditions. Thus modern analogy also flows out into the dispersal of meaning" (Paz 1986, 59).

In short, Octavio Paz considers that it is a flow of metaphors that governs this circulation between arts and languages.

> "Analogic translation is a rotating metaphor which engenders another metaphor which in turn provokes another and another: what do all these metaphors say? Nothing the painting has not already said yet: presence is concealed to the extent where meaning is dissolved" (Paz 1986, 59).

This process of metaphor engendering, that also implies an increased autonomy of modern art foreseen by Baudelaire's critique and clarified by Octavio Paz, carries nevertheless that

negative element regarding loss of meaning since ultimately, the autonomy of painting ends up in a disembodied abstract language, and in contemplation of emptiness. Paz also recognizes this in art movements or actions related to the denial of art, the subversive side of some avant-gardes such as Dada, which in face of the loss of references brings irony forward.

In other articles from this period, Paz also warns to the danger of sterility regarding abstract art, which despite being an autonomous language, does not share the codes with which the public may have some familiarity. Artists such as Mondrian or Pollock are pointed out and belong to this group.

In Cy Twombly's case his art is only partially abstract, and from Paz's perspective he would not be exposed to the risks of sterility. This position on Twombly's art is confirmed by Octavio Paz in the Menil Foundation interview:

> "John Harvey: In the same essay on Baudelaire's you write that "From Baudelaire on, painting thinks but does not speak, is language but does not mean; it is luminous matter and form, but it has ceased to be an image. You name this aesthetic of desembodiment."

> Paz: I think about the abstract painters who tried to dissipate the image, to provoke a new reality or sense of reality. Mondrian painted archetypes of this work. This is not the case with Twombly. On the contrary, he tries to recover life and its appearance, its movement, its chance, through the act of painting" (Paz 1995, 182).

According to Octavio Paz, Twombly therefore retains the faculty of recovering the real into an artistic production. In its reaction also to abstract expressionism it maintains a link with nature, but according to an impulse and purpose which preserves the mystery to which we have been referring. Ultimately, even the image presents itself as the threshold of that untranslatable to which the artist paves the way, a place where mainly sensibility dwells.

> "It's very difficult to talk about an artist, always we are talking about another way of trying to understand a secret, and the best thing to do is be content with the enigma of the painter; still, with this reservation, I would say that Cy Twombly wants to be able to see through the image. He wants to able to see the invisible in some ways, so his paintings have to do with light" (Paz 1995, 183).

Language and the Utopia of Universality

By highlighting the notion of universal translator evoked by Paz, it is important to deepen the sense of universality in the scope of language. As we shall see in the case of Twombly this concept diverges from the doomed project of universal languages.

With regard to the utopia of universal languages, Jean-Luc Baudras refers to this 18th century ambition as a desire to go "beyond the diversity of human languages corrupted by use and time" (Baudras 2009, 163). For the apologists of this project, it is about "rediscovering the logical language that, devoid of all ambiguities, allows to say the essence of things, thus reducing the possibilities of errors of judgment and making it easier the communication between scholars" (Baudras 2009, 163).

However, this research faced various difficulties affected by an excess of rationalization that turned it above all into an instrument of knowledge, but failing in the field of communication. In short, the project of a perfect universal language would have the ambition of removing ambiguity but also the importance of the "other" in the process of communication, as soon as a foreign element is recognized. Although, eliminating this foreign element looks like an impoverishing act regarding the base language. As Ricouer recognizes in his work on translation, "without the proof of the foreigner, would we keep sensitive to the strangeness of our own language? And, finally, without this proof, wouldn't we run the risk of closing ourselves in the bitterness of a monologue, alone with our books?" (Ricouer 2005, 52).

In regard to this idea of the perfect language that failed (due to excessive formalism), Ricouer counters a living language that preserves the "other" and the diversity within the empirical language without hiding inaccuracies, and not discarding the historical heritage.

The universal nature of Twombly's attitude (related to the translation of human culture sentences into images) is in tune with Ricouer's perspective, as it preserves the ambiguity of the gesture of writing. In fact, Twombly's artworks presents a poetic dimension that probably isn´t universal from the point of view of a perfect language but through the vague behavior that informs his paintings, which leave room for the imagination and challenge understanding, similarly to the obstacles of translation process. As Ricoeur says, we know "that no universal language is able to reconstruct its undefined diversity" (Ricouer 2005, 45).

It is important to acknowledge that the project of universal perfect languages which failed, sought to exclude the ambiguity that makes part of natural languages, this same ambiguity, that is a trace of the untranslatable.

Ultimately, the universality of Twombly's mark is above all a search that does not belong to communication in the common sense. On the other hand it is through myth and the secrets of human language and culture that the artist sets in motion a new construction, having as building blocks fragments of civilization. In this case, these sort of universality is different of a process of standardization, as it preserves and reaffirms cultural diversity. What is at stake is a specific "Access to the Universal" well-defined in the texts of Michel Serres: "As in the natural example of climate, there is a human language system that locally produces the mosaic diversity of languages. It is also proof that the Universal does not necessarily induce uniformity; only a force based on stupidity does it.(...) If globalization is opposed to differences, the Universal, on the contrary, favors them" (Serres 2005, 243).

Contrary to the static and uniform apriorism that would characterize a perfect language, Twombly's artworks makes us reflect on language, and recall the organic appeal and breath underneath it. This becomes more evident through the gesture of the free mark and trace, a sort of vital force that writes without a plan beyond his allusions to poems and places in human culture. So in a way, Twombly's writing and artistic process brings with it a movement similar to that of a living language. It is in a text by Demosthenes Davvetas that the author recognizes in Twombly's writing precisely a "writing of living beings":

> "The graphic subject is this line which neither wishes to ruin the pictorial surface nor aims to destroy the already-existing historic material. Rather, it seeks to disperse this material beyond familiar areas and employs a strategic exercise – beginning the journey by which "writing" becomes language" (Davvetas 1989, 93).

If Twombly combines different visions of human history, it is because his universalism cannot be certified as in the structure of a uniform language, there is a relativism in the action of gesture, of "writing" turned into a pictorial sign, whose dispersion approaches not only the dispersal of meaning that Paz and Davettas refer to, but also the rich contingency of the translating act described by Ricoeur:

> "Yes, it must be confessed: from one language to another, the situation is really one of dispersion and confusion. And yet, the translation is part of the long litany of "in spite of everything". Despite the fratricides, we militate for universal brotherhood. Despite the heterogeneity of languages, there are bilinguals, polyglots, interpreters and translators" (Ricouer 2005, 34).

Conclusion

At the end of this theoretical trajectory, we can compare our path to an intriguing experience that follows the liberating insights of Twombly's marks and words, while trying to get close to his art through a particular lense, enlarging the inscrutable images of his artworks.

This aspect is characterized by our topic, the untranslatable, which could only be accessed by approximations, having as a resource the contribution of art as an inquiry.

In short, this work was aimed to understand what is at stake in the scope of language, translation and the untranslatable, when this problem intersects with the visual arts, having the privilege of addressing it through the work of a painter with a strong influence of literature and writing. We developed a conception suggested by Octavio Paz of visual art as a language in the metaphorical sense with regard to Twombly, an approach that employs a language of visual sensations which translates in a unique way perceptions of nature and poetry. Supporting this approach, we explored a sort of analogic translation that allows various correspondences and welcomes different temporal/spatial moments into to the visual field. Still, with the insight of Octavio Paz's we testified the unique approach of Twombly to nature and to the world, which is different from the detachment that is possible to recognize in some abstract art. Without adopting a totally abstract strategy we stated nevertheless that his sort of translation isn´t related to representation either. Twombly's marks try to recapture nature and life through a sort of transfiguration, this act is about recovering the human path without becoming trapped in the past. The artist rewrites life, since the weight of human culture in his back turns into the desire to overcome it, inventing it once again with his unique approach.

We also testify how literature increases its scope through Twombly's appropriation of words, as it inspires the artist beyond the text, relating forms with the untranslatable in a sensitive realm. Most of the time this sensibility is bound with a visceral energy in which was recognized a sort of animal and living language, so, in a way, more than an equivalence with a sentence, Twombly's feverish pictorial inscriptions circumscribe the poetic space of the untranslatable through a sort of virtual outline, figuring out this untranslatable dimension.

Afterall Twombly stands as a kind of creative translator in the realm of the arts, signaling emotions and desires that cross borders, scenarios and epochs, with a torrent of mythologic and literary references. His lively free gestures, more than often provoke the dispersal of meaning, as we noted in our analysis while his images arise; this seems like a consequence of Twombly's strategy to counter the unapproachable dimension of his themes.

Finally, his ability to stand as a universal translator has nevertheless a non-uniform appeal. Twombly moves in a sort of universal mosaic that generates scribbles, spots…and singularities everywhere, through the impulse of a fable or poem not restricted by reality.

I would like to close this text persisting on the reference to the poetic since it supposes connections with the untranslatable, which has more similarities to a major experience without clear limits than to a concrete message that requires a careful reading. As Fernando Pessoa wrote through Álvaro de Campos, and transcribed by Twombly in a sculpture: "To feel all things in all ways".

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Notes

[1] See Robert Hughes https://fishplay.wordpress.com/2007/10/08/robert-hughes-on-cy-twombly/

[2] I refer to an intervention of Richard Serra in a conversation among artists moderated by Kirk Varnedoe. See Cy Twombly: An artist's artist. *Res – Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 28, Autumn (1995), p. 176.

[3] See Octavio Paz essay, Baudelaire as an Art Critic in *On Poets and Others.* New York, Arcade Publishing, Inc. (1986).

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Triśaṅku's Heaven: Translation Zone

EESHA KUMAR

Abstract: Hindi poet Ajñeya's essay "Rūṛhi aur Mauliktā" in the 1945 collection *Triśaṅku: Literature in the Age of Revolutionary Struggle* expresses a distinct philosophy of translation that not only illuminates the life and literary career of its author, but also provides a model for translation practice that takes untranslatability as a point of departure. This essay builds on existing scholarship to present a new reading of Ajñeya's quasi-translation of T.S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," placing it within the larger framework of Hindi's history, and foregrounding difficult questions about the uneven development of criticism and theory in different languages. Through this reading, the mythological figure of Triśaṅku emerges as a mascot for translation — and his ultimate location, which was also Ajñeya's, as an illustration of what Emily Apter calls a translation zone.

Keywords: Ajñeya, Triśaṅku, T.S. Eliot, Hindi modernism, Hindi literary criticism, translation

The Hindi revolutionary poet Ajñeya (1911-1987) and T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) had one thing in common: an interest in chemistry. In an otherwise intrepid translation of Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Ajñeya stays close to the letter in the famous passage that describes poetry as "the action which takes place when a bit of finely filleted platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide" (Eliot 39).[1] This moment of fidelity may suggest that Ajñeya and Eliot shared an understanding of *poesis* as the interaction of certain elements; but one was more interested in the resulting explosions than the other. Ajñeya's involvement in India's struggle against British colonialism included "the production of a large number of bombs in a factory set up in Delhi (under the name Himalayan Toilet Products) where his knowledge of chemistry proved especially valuable" (Trivedi, "Shekhar" 80). In contrast, Eliot famously described himself as a "classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-Catholic in religion" (*For Lancelot Andrews* ix). On a biographical level, these two thinkers seem to have had very little in common. Why did Ajñeya choose to translate Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," and how can one account for the style and texture of his translation? In addressing this question, this essay seeks to make three interventions. The first is with regard to the existing scholarship on Ajñeya, which has seen him as poet, novelist, journalist, soldier, revolutionary (the list goes on), but not as a thinker on translation.[2] The second is to reanimate a forgotten figure from an Indian myth — Triśaṅku, after whom Ajñeya's book is named — and to read that myth in a new way, as an allegory of translation. The third is to expand the conversation on translation and untranslatability by introducing these two figures — one historical, one mythical — to it.

Ajñeya's essay

Ajñeya's essay "Rūṛhi aur Mauliktā" ("Tradition and Originality")[3] is a strange piece of writing. In its vocabulary and three-part structure, it mirrors Eliot's "Tradition and the

Individual Talent," and refers to Eliot by name in the body of the essay (which would be highly unusual in any translation), but also occasionally gives up on translation by choosing to include certain passages in English, in the Roman script.[4] On the level of style, its rough and repetitive quality is unexpected, given Ajñeya's reputation as a literary stylist. On the level of content, there are noteworthy departures from Eliot's essay. For instance, instead of translating Eliot's comments on British society into Hindi, Ajñeya chooses to present his own views on contemporary Indian society. Sometimes, he supplements Eliot's metaphors with his own.[5] He surpasses Eliot in his descriptions of the trembling present moment in which the past is always reflected.[6] It seems as though Ajñeya is attempting to make Eliot speak in Hindi; or rather to speak Eliot in Hindi. It is almost like plagiarism, except that the source is both obvious and explicitly acknowledged. This confusion reaches its peak when Ajñeya's translation discourages poets from seeking out new experiences that will only lead to debauchery.[7] Since Ajñeya was the author of novels that were considered indecent — Harish Trivedi has called him Hindi's D.H. Lawrence ("Shekhar" 80) — what can we call this if not parody? In this essay, Ajñeya seems like an actor putting on a costume and becoming familiar with a new role, improvising when the fancy takes him, testing out different tones and registers; constantly slipping between citing and being.

But why was this young radical interested in the politically conservative T.S. Eliot? This was not just any young writer, but one who had spent five years in prison for his involvement in revolutionary activities (Govind 110). In "A Hundred Years of T.S. Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent,'" Kevin Dettmar describes Eliot's essay as "the most influential English-language literary essay of the twentieth century . . . the criticism that critics read when they're figuring out that they want to be critics." In this context, it would make sense for a young writer beginning a career in criticism to turn to Eliot for inspiration. This is a partial explanation that will have to be elaborated by means of another concern: what was the special significance of translating Eliot's most famous critical essay into Hindi?

Hindi is a young language. It became a medium of instruction, recognisable in its current standardised form, only in the late 19th century (McGregor, vii). A discernible literary tradition began in 20th century, and criticism is younger still (Prakash). While Sanskrit, considered the root of Hindi, is one of the oldest philosophical languages in the world, one could argue that Hindi's life as a language of theory and philosophy has only just begun. Compared to other Indian languages, philosophy and theory in translation seem to have reached Hindi with some difficulty. The scholar-translator Prabhakar Machwe observed in 1967 that when he attempted to write an essay in Hindi on Nietzsche in 1935,

> there was not a single book in Hindi on Kant, while in Bengali there were two books on his philosophy. Three of Russell's books have been translated into Malayalam, and in Urdu there is a translation of Husserl from the original German. What is true about philosophy is more or less true about other sciences, especially as regards rhetorics, aesthetics, literary criticism, etc. (69).

Machwe's account allows us to read Ajñeya's translation of Eliot — who provided a model not only of literary success, but critical force — as an attempt to address the lack of a critical or scholarly conversation in the world of Hindi letters.

Perhaps this is because unlike Bangla, Urdu and Malayalam, modern Hindi was more of an invented language. In order to achieve its current standardised form, it had to cast off its links with Brajbhasha, which had a fully-fledged literary tradition, including a number of treatises in poetics. "The movement from Brajbhasha to Khari Boli served

to cut [Hindi] off substantially from its accumulated literary idiom and tradition and its grassroots vitality" (Trivedi, "The Progress of Hindi, Part 2" 1016). An experimental energy fueled a period of great creativity as canons of poetry and fiction were invented in this new medium. Ajñeya's essay suggests that a philosophical idiom may have been slower to develop. He admits in his introduction to this collection of essays that he has made no attempt to be original; the essays are inspired by the absence of certain theories and ideas in Hindi, by the lack of a framework of critique and evaluation. It is as if, having found no existing models for this kind of work in Hindi, he attempts to introduce it from the outside, like "a bit of finely filleted platinum…into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide" (Eliot 39).

Despite Ajñeya's efforts, the lack of a vibrant philosophical discourse in Hindi appears to persist. Leading contemporary critic Apoorvanand's most recent book, *Sāhitya Kā Ekānt* (*The Solitude of Literature*), describes a crisis in the field of Hindi literary theory. With the immense critical energy of the 1960s and '70s having dimmed, Apoorvanand argues that Hindi writers today are interested in criticism or reviews only to the extent that they advertise their new books; criticism is therefore no longer autonomous — it is no longer a matter of life and death (8). If one were to read Apoorvanand alone, one would not be struck by a lack of Hindi participation in international conversations on philosophy and aesthetics. In the space of one essay (the second one in the volume), he cites Maurice Merleau-Ponty (25), Miroslav Holub (27), Leon Trotsky (27), Christopher Caldwell (28), Stéphane Mallarmé (28), Karl Marx (31), Nizaar Kabbani (32), Louis Althusser (34), and Jacques Lacan (35). In this regard, however, it would be safe to think of Apoorvanand as the exception rather than the rule. In fact, it is clear that in making these citational choices, he reflects the same concerns as Ajñeya. "Rūṛhi aur Mauliktā" is valuable not because it demonstrates a confident critical voice, to which Apoorvanand comes closer, but because it showcases the search for one: it is a moment of exploratory ventriloquism.

In Ajñeya's struggle between tradition and innovation, we see him impishly mimicking the most prestigious existing model for literary critical success, while simultaneously practicing what may have been a pre-colonial mode of translation: repeating in order to explain or annotate. Sheldon Pollock writes in the introduction to *World Philology* that while "there is evidence of frequent and varied translation into and out of Sanskrit and other languages, we find no reflection on the practice in any South Asian intellectual tradition before colonialism (even in the Indo-Persian world, despite the massive translation project undertaken by the early Mughal court), not even the terms by which to describe it" (16). In Pollock's view, this lack of a label suggests the degree to which translation was fundamental to, and constitutive of, Indian knowledge systems, which did not have a word for philology either. In their book *Post-Colonial Translation*, Bassnett and Trivedi describe "anuvād" as "the word for translation in Sanskrit," which may therefore be a problematic characterisation, but correctly go on to say that it

> etymologically and primarily means 'saying after or again, repeating by way of explanation, explanatory repetition or reiteration with corroboration or illustration, explanatory reference to anything already said' (Monier-Williams 1997:38). (One of the early Sanskrit uses of the word in this sense occurs in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* in a passage which T.S. Eliot picked up for use in the last section of *The Waste Land*; Eliot's 'What the Thunder Said' is, in the Sanskrit source, strictly speaking What the Thunder Translated/Repeated… (9).

This background brings us closer to understanding what Ajñeya was trying to do with, and to, Eliot in "Rūṛhi Aur Mauliktā." This pre-colonial understanding of anuvād (or what we now call translation), with its emphasis on temporal rather than spatial transfer,

is closer perhaps to Walter Benjamin's notion of translation as "afterlife" (71) than it is to translation as synchronic transformation. Saying-after is a useful rubric for translation because it provides a horizon beyond fidelity, and highlights questions of contemporary reception and our living relationship with texts from the past.

Ajñeya's life (a longer essay)

The associations of the word "essay" with the French "essayer" (to try, or attempt), and the old English "assay" (to weigh, measure, or ascertain), allow us to make the leap from a piece of writing to a life. Translators are drawn to tasks in which success is not guaranteed (where, in fact, abject failure is more likely), and are moved to weigh one word against another, one language against another, even one world against another.[8] The word "assay" may have fallen out of common usage, but, in a happy continuation of an earlier motif, it is still used in chemical fields in the sense of making an experiment, "the trial of metals, by 'touch,' fire, etc.; the determination of the quantity of metal in an ore or alloy" (OED Online). If culture can be thought of as a means of measuring and assigning value, then literary translation is a similar negotiation not only with particular measurements, but with the units of measurement.[9] Thus two whole cultures, whose means of measuring may not align, are brought into confrontation by those who live somehow in both cultures, and are inspired to translate.

Around the time that this first collection of essays was published, Ajñeya was considered both the Eliot and the Pound of Hindi poetry (Trivedi, "Ajñeya" 80). What does it mean to "be" the Eliot, the Pound, the Lawrence of a certain language, and not just to be the translator of their works? Salman Rushdie has, in a different context, described postcolonial writers as "translated men" (17). Translation, then, is not merely a literary activity, but one that extends to metaphysical and political being. Translation involves difficult choices and imperfect outcomes. Ajñeya's life involved a number of such decisions. One, for instance, was enrolling in the British army during World War II. Why would an active member of the Indian independence movement volunteer to fight on behalf of an imperial army? Such a decision cannot be understood within a bipolar framework of colonial struggle. Ajñeya saw himself as participating in larger international events, in which India's relationship with the British empire was only one part of the picture. His reason for joining the British army was that the greater evil of fascism in Germany had to be actively resisted (Trivedi, "Shekhar" 81). One had to "[take] responsibility and action in a situation of global crisis, rather than just discussing idealized conceptions of perfect nationalist or revolutionary action" (Govind 129).

Therefore, one's identity as anti-colonial or revolutionary emerges as contingent and only relationally defined. In order to understand these translated lives and living relationships, one rubric or framework is rarely sufficient. We have to take into account several different points of view in order to begin to appreciate these choices. In other words, we have to translate; we have to simultaneously consider more than one value system. If Ajñeya's Sanskritised prose style, his invocation of Eliot, his enrolment in the British army seem to water down his revolutionary commitments, it is also true that he chose to remain a Hindi writer all his life, although he could have easily stepped into the limelight of Anglophone literary culture if he chose. Even after he started teaching at the University of California in Berkeley, Hindi literature was his chosen creative world, in which he experimented with almost every conceivable form, genre and medium. Like the mythological figure Triśaṅku, Ajñeya experienced many opposing pulls in his literary career — for instance, some critics thought he was too Western, others that he was too uncritical of the East (Trivedi, "The Progress of Hindi" 1013) — and his being was invested in these conflicts.

"Rūṛhi aur Mauliktā" is a translation in the way that each live performance of a piece of music is a translation of that piece. It is also critical in the way that "each performance of a symphony . . . is also a critique of that symphony. Unlike the reviewer, however, the performer 'invests his own being in the process of interpretation'" (Dyer 184). In translating Eliot, Ajñeya was not only mimicking him, he was actively practicing critique. His translation is ambiguous: one cannot tell when he speaks as himself and when he speaks as Eliot, one cannot tell when he is sincere and when he is joking. And it is especially ironic that in an essay about the necessity of respecting tradition, one cannot be sure to which tradition he refers: Hindi was still in the process of building a canon, and the Anglophone tradition was that of the coloniser — against whom he was involved in activities as antagonistic as bomb-making. Against which tradition could he be evaluated?

It is fruitful to reflect, in this context, on his pen name. It was a name he did not choose, and one that he always hated for its mystical connotations; it was chosen for him by Premchand (an esteemed figure in the Hindi literary scene) after it was suggested that he use a pseudonym to avoid the scrutiny of British authorities (Trivedi, "Shekhar" 79). The word "ajñeya" means "unknowable," and evokes an impenetrability, a secrecy. It evokes that which resists comprehension, and eludes translation. The Hindi word for "agnostic" is "ajñeyavādī," someone who claims that the existence or nonexistence of God cannot be known, but also, one whose speech is with regard to the unknown. It is an uncommon word, and difficult to pronounce even for the native speaker. In a noteworthy instance of untranslatability, the nasal consonant jña "cannot be correctly conveyed by any combination of the Roman alphabet."[10] That the writer had mixed feelings about his *nom-de-plume* is fitting; we are not able to fix a final meaning or connotation onto a word always withdrawing into obscurity. Originating in a context of secrecy, conflict and resistance, the name marks the necessity and impossibility of translation: one cannot know for certain, but one speaks; one is unable to speak as oneself and so one speaks as another; in order to speak one's mind, one takes on a name about which one is, at best, ambivalent.

"Rūṛhi aur Mauliktā" is an isolated instance of translation that allows us to perceive a larger and more diffuse pattern. Whether it was in the domain of literature or in the war zone, Ajñeya did not seem to consider the incommensurability of cultures an obstacle to translation. It was instead the cornerstone of a lifetime committed to translation. His choices cannot be understood from within one framework alone; one has to look simultaneously at worlds that do not perfectly map onto each other: indigenous commentarial practices and Anglophone modernism, anticolonial struggle in India and alliance with the colonial master against fascism in Germany. These are choices characterised by constant negotiation, compromise, and discernment of a terrain that is always shifting, where one's knowledge is therefore always incomplete — and yet one must act and speak.

Triśaṅku

It is in this spirit, arguably, that Ajñeya named his first book of essays after the mythological figure Triśaṅku.[11] To summarise the myth as it appears in Sargas 56-60 in the Bālakāṇḍa of the *Rāmāyaṇa*: Triśaṅku was a king who wished to go to heaven with his mortal body, which was against the natural order of things. When his family priest, Vasiṣṭha, refused to help him, he approached Vasiṣṭha's sons, who cursed him to become a caṇḍāla: "He became black and coarse, with black garments and unkempt hair. His ornaments were of iron, his garlands and ointment from the cremation ground" (233). Unrecognisable to his people, the king approaches Viśvāmitra, a rival ascetic,

who agrees to help him. Viśvāmitra succeeds in sending Triśaṅku towards the heavens, but the gods, who do not want him, send him hurtling back down, and Triśaṅku is suspended in mid-air between heaven and earth. An enraged Viśvāmitra starts to create a new universe for Triśaṅku, with new constellations, and even new gods. The existing gods, threatened and alarmed, manage to pacify Viśvāmitra, and convince him to leave Triśaṅku hanging upside down in his partial heaven (231-238).

What Triśaṅku wants is impossible. He wants existence in another realm without having undergone any change himself, without having paid, as it were, the price of admission. Insofar as language is seen to bear not only lexicons, but entire worlds, the ontological dimension of Triśaṅku's desire only makes this more apt as a story of translation. It is no ordinary frontier that he seeks to cross, but the final, fundamental one: that of death itself. One is reminded of Ariel's description of Ferdinand's dead father in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*:

> Nothing of him doth fade,
> But doth suffer a sea change
> Into something rich and strange (36).

Even when death is not imagined as nonexistence, it appears to involve a transformation (corporeal or otherwise) into something that cannot be translated. This is no impediment to Triśaṅku's desire — or perhaps the radical nature of the wish is precisely what makes it irresistible. A promise will be made to him that his wish can come true, but it is realised only in a partial way, in a heaven that is incomplete; and he is in fact forced to change in ways he could never have imagined.

The myth has obvious parallels with the story of Dedalus, but evokes a realm that is neither here nor elsewhere — excessive, even slightly comical — where a certain kind of person (a translator?) might reside.[12] Three elements of this story are particularly striking. First, that Triśaṅku will not go to heaven in his kingly body, but in the lowest and most reviled body in the system of caste (*Rāmāyaṇa* 58.4). Second, this entire episode takes place in an affective nexus of envy, greed, and pride — Triśaṅku is little more than a pawn in the long drawn out power struggle between rival ascetics Vasiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra. His impertinent ascension is orchestrated by those who don't have permission, or aren't quite the right people for job: "How can the gods and seers in a sacrificial assembly partake of the offerings of a man whose sacrificial priest is a kshatriya, especially when he himself is a pariah?" (58.14). Finally, in a point related to the overreach just described, there is a dissatisfaction so deep with the givenness of the world that these characters are able to change it, albeit with completely unexpected results and at great personal cost. This is Triśaṅku's plea to Viśvāmitra: "Please try through human effort to overcome the power of fate" (57.23).

The desire for translation is a desire for the impossible: one cannot enter a language (a world) while still being 'within' another language (another world), and yet without the impulse to do so there can be no translation. If one is able to cross over to another language, by sheer desire and application, one cannot do so in the pristine form of the original language, but only having become unrecognisable both to oneself and to one's people. The result is to be caught in a limbo between two languages, in a new world that could not have existed prior to this specific interaction, this conflict. Triśaṅku's heaven, then, is what Emily Apter calls a translation zone, where,

> cast as an act of love, and as an act of disruption, translation becomes a means of reposi-
> tioning the subject in the world and in history; a means of rendering self-knowledge
> foreign to itself; a way of denaturalizing citizens, taking them out of the comfort zone
> of national space, daily ritual, and pre-given domestic arrangements. It is a truism that
> the experience of becoming proficient in another tongue delivers a salubrious blow to

narcissism, both national and individual. Translation failure demarcates intersubjective limits, even as it highlights that 'eureka' spot where consciousness crosses over to a rough zone of equivalency or crystalizes around an idea that belongs to no one language or nation in particular (6).

The mythological Triśaṅku is a worthy mascot for translators because rather than symbolising arrival, the conclusion of the famous "carrying across" of *translatio*, he typifies incompletion, far-fetched ambitions and unforeseen consequences. This is either a cautionary tale or a very inspiring one: Triśaṅku's final fate may have been to hang upside down as a pariah in the sky, but he is still a source of illumination. The Triśaṅku constellation, known also as the Southern Cross, is the smallest of the eighty-eight recognised constellations, but it is also one of the brightest ("Crux Constellation").

Translation

In recent scholarly conversations, the concept of untranslatability has been marshalled against the flattening and diminishing impact of globalisation, and against an unthinking attitude that sees all languages as equal, or equally available to the comparatist. This concept, therefore, marks a necessary and urgent intervention. However, it is important to acknowledge, as Apter does in a prefatory remark in *The Dictionary of Untranslatables,* that, taken to an extreme, an absolutist and mystical attitude towards the nonequivalence of languages "[neglects]…the fact that some pretty good equivalencies are available" (xiv). As the Triśaṅku myth — and the life of Ajñeya — suggest, there is a desire for translation in spite of and because of its impossibility; the fact that perfect translation is impossible is not something that should make us stop, but one that allows us to begin.

"Rūṛhi aur Mauliktā" gives us an occasion to think about the non-equivalence of languages, because it seems to have been inspired and brought about by an interest in what this non-equivalence makes possible. The breach that one confronts is not merely lexical, but also conceptual, and ultimately political. In the essay "The Hindi Postcolonial—Categories and Configurations" Harish Trivedi underscores the irony of a postcolonial discourse that takes place entirely in English, with its headquarters in American universities. "It remains debatable whether either postcolonial discourse as currently constituted or Hindi literature has anything to gain from the other" (400). It is strange that literature in Indian languages about the independence struggle does not constitute a significant part of any postcolonial canon or tradition. It is as if the category "postcolonial" does not exist in the Hindi language. What is this if not a translation problem?

A more robust translation culture allowing theoretical conversations across languages would be wonderful; but it is necessary to pause and consider the causes for these astonishing incompatibilities. One has to ask to what extent Hindi is at a loss without a theoretical discourse on post-colonialism, or theoretical discourse *tout court*. Hindi has the unique distinction of being considered both the language of an independence struggle and a hegemonic language in the subcontinent (Trivedi, "The Progress of Hindi, Part 2" 959). English has certainly not given up its imperial position by virtue of having a postcolonial discourse; if anything, Trivedi and others argue that it has only used this discourse to accrue more power to itself. It is a confusion of categories, made visible by translation, that allows us to understand this. One must take the time the time to appreciate the ways in which languages differ; after all these differences are what make translation possible.

Ajñeya's example leads us to consider other potential mediums for Comparative Literature than English, and to wonder whether this discipline could exist without "Theory" in English and other European languages. What might that discipline look

like? Ajñeya nudges us to ask this question, to ask if other worlds — other ridiculous heavens — are possible. He reminds us to assume this task without falling prey to essentialism or an uncritical nationalism, and to laugh at ourselves all the while. Ajñeya places himself in Triśaṅku's heaven, in that outlawed confusion of categories, even if it involves what looks like compromise, because it is better than doing nothing and saying nothing. If we wish to find reasons to forgive him for taking up Eliot, we need only think of their shared interest in chemical reactions, and the different routes that passion took in their lives. This brings to mind Langston Hughes' poem "Harlem," especially in the context of Ajñeya's later novels that expressed a disenchantment with what independent India looked like:

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Dreams explode, and reckless stunts have accidental, cosmic outcomes, in the translation zone. "Rūṛhi aur Mauliktā" is an invitation to be more bold, not less, in the face of confused categories. Having put aside the fear of failure, we can start to fail in more luminous ways.

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Notes

[1] This is Ajñeya's translation: "अंग्रेजी कवि-आलोचक टी. एस. इलियट ने इस क्रिया की तुलना एक रसायनिक क्रिया से की है। सल्फर डायक्साइड और आक्सीजन से भरे हुए पात्र में यदि प्लाटिनम का चूर्ण प्रविष्ट किया जाये, तो वे दोनों गैसें मिलकर सल्फ्यूरस एसिड में प्रवर्तित हो जाती हैं। यह क्रिया प्लाटिनम की उपस्थिति के बिना नहीं होती, तथापि बननेवाले अम्ल में प्लाटिनम का कोई अंश नहीं होता, न प्लाटिनम में किसी प्रकार का कोई परिवर्तन ही दीखता है — वह ज्यों-का-त्यों पड़ा रह जाता है।" (37).

[2] Rupert Snell's wonderful close readings in the 1993 essay "Ajneya Translates Ajneya: The Nilambari Poems" do not quite constitute an exception. The essay showcases all that is lost in translation from Hindi to English, but its focus is Ajñeya's poems and the practice of translation. There is no consideration here of an Ajñeyan philosophy of translation.

[3] The word "mauliktā" is derived from "mūla," which means root or foundation, and is therefore surprisingly close to "tradition" for a title that seeks to differentiate tradition from originality. However, given that a root can symbolise a lineage as well as a fresh beginning, it is by no means inappropriate. I am grateful to M.J. Ernst for the observation that the word "origin" contains the same ambiguity. In his translation, Ajñeya describes a lack of tradition as a deracination. The figure of the root therefore aligns both with tradition and with originality in Ajñeya's thought. This figure does not appear in Eliot's essay.

[4] Only in first introduction to the collection does one find that the author describes it as "lagbhag bhāvānuvād," a sort-of/approximate translation of the sense of Eliot's essay.

[5] This image of a crucible follows his translation of the above-mentioned reaction between sulphur dioxide and oxygen:

"एक दूसरी उपमा की शरण लें तो कवि का मन एक भट्टी है जिसके ताप में विभिन्न धातुएँ पिघलकर एकरस हो जाती हैं। ढली हुई धातु विभिन्न तत्वों से बनी है, उनमें से कुछ धातुएँ स्वयं भट्टी के स्वामी की संपत्ति भी हो सकती हैं, तथापि भट्टी के स्वामी से भट्टी का, और भट्टी से धातु का अलगाव और स्वतंत्र अस्तित्व अक्षुण्ण बना रहता है (37-38)।"

(To use another simile, the poet's mind is like a furnace, in the heat of which various metals melt and become one. This new metal is made from various other metals, some of which may have belonged to the owner of the furnace, but the separation between the furnace and its owner, and the furnace and the metals, remains intact.)

[6] Here he displays a Benjaminian sensibility in his philosophy of time. Walter Benjamin was interested in ways of recuperating the past without recourse to nostalgia: a critical framework that would allow one to understand how one has arrived at one's current moment; the Arcades Project is an illustration of this approach. As Terry Eagleton writes in an essay on Benjamin, "Those who wipe out the past are in danger of abolishing the future as well. Nobody was more intent on eradicating the past than the Nazis…" https://www.newstatesman.com/ideas/2009/11/past-benjamin-future-obama

[7] "काव्य में नूतनता — और बिना नूतनता के कला कहाँ है — लाने के लिए कवि को नूतन अनुभव खोजने की आवश्यकता नहीं है। ऐसी खोज — नूतन मानवीय अनुभूतियाँ प्राप्त करने की लहक — उसे मानवीय वासनाओं के विकृत रूपों की ओर ही ले जाएगी , ओर उस पर पुष्ट होनेवाला साहित्य या काव्य विकृति (perversity) का ही सिहित्य होगा। कवि का कार्य नये अनुभवों की, नये भावों की खोज नहीं है , प्रत्युत पुराने ओर परिचित भावों के उपकरण से ही ऐसी नूतन अनुभूतियों की सृष्टि करना जो उन भावों से पहले प्राप्त नहीं की जा चुकी हैं (39)।"

(In order to be original — and what is art without originality? — the poet does not have to go in search of new experiences. This search — the blazing desire for new human experiences — will take him in the direction of perversity and lust, and the literature that feeds on that will only be the literature of perversity. The task of the poet is not to hunt for new experiences or emotions, rather, by means of well-known experiences to create new perceptions which had not been done before with those emotions.)

At the end of this paragraph, Ajñeya describes the kind of chemist a poet ought to be: "he is not the discoverer of new elements; his success and greatness lies in generating miracles by developing new compounds from known elements." The Hindi text: "वह नयी धातुओं का शोधक नहीं है; हमारी जानी हुई धातुओं से ही नया योग ढालने में ओर उससे नया चमत्कार उत्पन्न करने में उसकी सफलता ओर महानता है।" (39).

[8] The idea that a language, with its epistemological horizons, bears an entire world, or worldview, has come up repeatedly in recent thought on language, articulated by thinkers as diverse as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (13) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (63).

[9] "A lot of Chemistry is simply converting between units," or systems of measurement; when one contemplates this process of conversion, and the complex calculations it entails, one is confronted with the arbitrary and somewhat capricious quality of our best available means of measurement (Green 0:32-3:39).

[10] https://www.wisdomlib.org/definition/jna

[11] The book, Ajñeya tells us in his second introduction, fully lived up to this name with a publication history involving multiple delays, the outbreak of war, the scarcity of paper, the locking up of printing presses, lost pages, and much back-and-forth between censors and district magistrates.

[12] The fact that certain words in Ajñeya's essay appear in English and in the Roman script, suggests that he was addressing other "translated men," those who shared a space with him in "Triśaṅku's heaven."

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Tied to German, Unable to Find a Foothold in Yiddish: Examining Kafka Editing Choices of Yitzhak Löwy's 'Vom jüdischen Theater'

AARON CARPENTER

Abstract: When Franz Kafka first saw Yitzhak Löwy's Yiddish theater troupe perform in Prague in 1911, he was enthralled with this unabashed expression of Jewishness from the actors, which lead to an almost yearlong study of Yiddish language and theater. This study culminates in Kafka's speech on Yiddish, in which he claims that Yiddish had no fixed grammar, was made up entirely of loanwords, but that his audience would be able to understand more than they realize through their knowledge of German. In the speech, Kafka promotes speaking a faux Yiddish, imitating the sounds and structures of Yiddish speech, in German. In several letters to friends, Kafka includes quotes from Löwy. This article discusses a particularly long quote which has not been widely examined. in which Löwy's writing style features a blend of Yiddish and archaic, poetic German. Though Kafka expresses appreciation for Löwy's playfulness with German grammar, he also smugly states that it was difficult to understand. Kafka's own fixation with 'proper' German grammar did not allow him to replicate this way of speaking in his own works, which are famously free of regionalisms and which make only oblique references to Jewish culture and worldview. As editor of an article that Löwy wanted to publish in the magazine *Der Jude*, Kafka strikes a balance between maintaining 'proper' German grammar, while imitating features of Yiddish, such as the interspersion of Hebrew words within the German and, in one case, imitating Yiddish speech patterns. In this article, Kafka, as editor, is able to overcome his long-internalized anti-Semitic sentiments, which compel him to avoid regionalisms and direct references to Jewish culture, and his interest in Yiddish, which for him allows for an unabashed expression of that culture.

Keywords: Kafka, Löwy, Yiddish, Editing, Untranslatability

When Franz Kafka first saw Yitzhak Löwy's Yiddish theater troupe perform in Prague in 1911, he was enthralled with the actors' unabashed expression of Jewishness, which led to an almost yearlong study of Yiddish language and theater. In his 1912 speech on Yiddish, Kafka depicts the language as more naturally evolved from Middle High German than German, as well as rife with loanwords from various languages and with no fixed grammar (Kafka, Rede 423). He also argues that it is impossible to translate Yiddish into German because the two languages are so similar (Kafka, Rede 425). While his rhetorical purpose was to make Yiddish sound interesting to a group of acculturated German Jews who might otherwise be skeptical of or even hostile to Yiddish, the speech contains many inaccuracies about Yiddish. However, it also reflects some of Kafka's later comments on Jewish identity and several features he mentions are reflected in a large quote from Löwy which Kafka includes in a letter to his then-fiancé Felice Bauer. While his quotations from Löwy show an interest in the actor's playful use of grammar which are influenced by Yiddish and show features of archaic German, in his own works Kafka adheres strictly to German grammar rules and does not directly reference Jewish culture nor does he use loanwords. As editor of Löwy's article "Vom

jüdischen Theater," On the Jewish Theater, Kafka takes a completely different approach, allowing the actor to retain his authorial voice through the inclusion of mostly Hebrew loanwords, archaic German, and direct references to Jewish culture.

This article traces Kafka's understanding of Yiddish and how it helps him to express his experiences as a Jew in German while striking a balance with his own internalized prejudices. It begins with Kafka's initial feeling of estrangement from both the German language and other Jews, as well as his thoughts on how to write about one's life as a Jew in German. *Willkür und Gesetz*, whim and law, is a key aspect of Yiddish for Kafka as it represents Yiddish's playfulness with grammar and mixing of languages. Kafka saw Yiddish as a sociolect of German, emphasizing the Germanic elements and largely ignoring the Slavic influences; though he never seemed to learn the language beyond what he could understand vis-a-vis German. This is highlighted in a quote from Löwy that Kafka included in a letter to Felice Bauer. However, his interest was tempered by his concerns about being perceived as writing an artificial German, often associated with Jews who wrote in German, and how he saw himself as a protector of the German language, which he viewed as hostile to foreign elements. This led him to reference Jewish culture and worldview indirectly in his own works. With this background, the article turns to examines Löwy's article "Vom jüdischen Theater" and what editorial choices Kafka made to retain Löwy's authorial voice through the inclusion of Hebrew and Yiddish words and direct references to Jewish culture, while also using 'correct' German grammar.

There are numerous influential books and articles that look specifically at Kafka's relationship to Yiddish, the Yiddish theater, and how he describes his life as a Jew in his writings. Many of these works focus on how Kafka struggled with internalized feelings of anti-Semitism, while also being deeply interested in Yiddish theater. Several articles also examine Kafka's interest in the Yiddish language while also balking at how it diverged from German grammar. In his 2011 article, Mark Harman argues that a translator of Kafka needs to understand the undertones of Jewish culture in his works as Kafka uses descriptions that would be "coded" Jewish.[1] In her essay, Maria Kager (2013) examines several diary entries and letters by Kafka to argue that Kafka felt estranged from other Jews in the Habsburg empire. For Kager, this was due in part to Kafka's father's desire to distance himself from Jewish society in Prague; this feeling was lifted only after he found an alternative way to express himself as a Jew through Löwy and his Yiddish theater troupe. In the seminal *Kafka and the Yiddish Theater* (1971), Evelyn Torten Beck breaks down how themes, plots, and characters from several Yiddish plays that Kafka had seen, as well as his friendship with Löwy, influenced his early works. Doreen Densky (2015) focuses her analysis on Kafka's "Speech on Yiddish", which she argues emphasizes the "lively" and "transitory" aspects of Yiddish. In *Beyond the Mother Tongue* (2012), Yasemin Yildiz demonstrates that while Kafka showed great fascination with the "lively" aspects of Löwy's writing, he struggled with how to make it adhere to German grammar rules. In several works, Jeffery Grossman (2000, 2014) examines multiple translations of popular Yiddish writers into German and explores why the translators chose to use Hebrew-derived words or find a German equivalent to either emphasize or downplay Yiddish culture and how those changes affected their translations. In this article, I will show that the "lively" and "transitory" aspects of Yiddish that Kafka emphasizes, appear in the edited article both as loanwords from Yiddish and Hebrew, as well as a poetic style peppered with archaic words, which also appeared in a letter from Löwy.

In his famous letter to Max Brod on minor literature from June 1921 Kafka laments that a German Jew can do nothing but *mauscheln*, which he describes as: "die laute

oder stillschweigende oder auch selbstquälerische Anmaßung eines fremden Besitzes […] auch wenn nicht der einzigste Sprachfehler nachgewiesen werden könnte" (*Briefe* 336-37). *Mauscheln* was a term developed as Jews in German-speaking countries began adopting the German language and used by non-Jewish Germans to deny that Jews could speak German as a native language, it could only be an imitation. Kafka's obsession with avoiding writing that could be perceived as *mauscheln* led him to critique a line from Brod's translation of Leoš Janáček's Czech opera, "Jenufa" as sounding artificial, like the German that they got from their non-German mothers (Kafka, *Briefe* 178-79). In other words, it sounds like a 'bad' German that could be associated with Jews. But Kafka also saw the potential for creativity in this tension. For him, the creativity of young Jews who began to write in German was inspired when they were still tied to the Judaism of their fathers but could not find a foothold in the German language or culture that they tried to enter (*Briefe* 337). This failure to find a foothold in the dominant culture while also feeling estranged from the culture of their fathers led to creativity in how to write in German as Jews, but they could not reference Jewish culture directly. For Kafka, "the German idea of a *Muttersprache* had not yet accepted the *Komödie* of its borrowings from French as well as Jewish sources" and that German culture grew hostile when these elements were exposed (Suchoff, Jewish 75, emphasis in the original). He is searching for a way for German Jews to express themselves fully as Jews without creating a comedy of errors.

Before his exposure to the Yiddish theater, Kafka did not feel much connection with the Jewish community. He once lamented in his diary on January 8, 1914: "Was habe ich mit Juden gemeinsam? Ich habe kaum etwas mit mir gemeinsam" (Tagebuch 255). As Kager writes, his parents disregarded Jewish customs and even looked down on Jewish culture so that consequently "Kafka felt estranged from Judaism" (168). This changed when he saw some performances from Löwy`s acting troupe. In a diary entry, Kafka portrays the Yiddish actor Frau Klug as an ersatz mother-figure when she calls to her "*jüdische Kinderloch*" [2] (sic!), little Jewish children, which draws Kafka and the audience to her[3] (Yildiz 45). The figure of the mother comes up again in his diary entry from October 24, 1911, when Kafka writes that he was not able to love his mother fully because he used the German-Christian word *Mutter* to describe her as a Jewish woman. For Kafka, there is a mode of intention inherent in the role of *Mutter*: someone who has "christliche Glanz" but also "christliche Kälte," characteristics which Kafka argues do not apply to a Jewish mother (Kafka, *Tagebücher* 102). A different signifier with a more Jewish mode of intention is needed. Kafka suggests and then immediately dismisses the word *Mama*, because it is strongly associated with "Mutter" (*Tagebücher* 102).

For Kafka, the Christian (non-Jewish) mode of intention within German makes it impossible to translate his understanding of Yiddish into German as the Christian mode of intention will always have primacy when speaking German[4] as it is the language of the majority culture in which he lives. It is the mode of intention that causes *Brot* and *pain* to mean different things to a German and Frenchman in Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator,", but they are both cultural signifiers that developed from the same fundamental thing: *bread*. In other words, "während dergestalt die Art des Meinens in diesen beiden Wörtern einander widerstrebt, ergänzt sie sich in den beiden Sprachen, denen sie entstammen" (Benjamin 16). For Benjamin, a word cannot be translated individually for its mode of intentions to be fully understood; the meaning of an individual word must be understood within the context of the whole work (20). The question for Kafka was how do you show the Jewish "mode of intention" in the German language?

Kafka first proposes a solution in his speech, "Rede Über die Jiddische Sprache," in which he emphasizes the transitory nature of Yiddish: it has no fixed form, is not contained by grammar, and contains many languages within it. With these characteristics "strömen in diese Sprachgebilde von Willkür und Gesetz die Dialekte des Jargon noch ein" (Kafka, Rede 423). Kafka associates *Willkür und Gesetz* in Yiddish with variations in grammar and liberal borrowings from other languages, in contrast to the hostility which some German-speakers showed towards the foreign elements in the German language. Kafka also argues, though not convincingly, that Yiddish developed more naturally from Middle High German than German[5] (Kafka, Rede 423).

In the speech and in his diary entries around this period, Kafka describes and shows examples of Yiddish that are understandable to German-speakers. The only non-German Yiddish word that Kafka uses in his diary and letters is a Hebrew curse word his father used: *meschugge* (crazy), a word which probably had a deep emotional meaning for Kafka.[6] Kafka focuses primarily on the German, and later Hebraic, influences on Yiddish. He only mentions the Slavic influence on Yiddish once in his speech and never provides examples. Kafka encourages his audience to focus on what they can understand of Yiddish from their knowledge of German and to allow this "uninhibited" form of being Jewish to wash over them through performance, which would allow the "Yiddish" meaning and context of a word to come through.

An excellent example of showing meaning through context comes from a letter dated April 8, 1913, where Kafka quotes a letter from Löwy when he was sick. "Gott ist groß, wenn er gebt, so gebt er von alle Seiten" (Kafka, Briefe an Felice 360). Löwy starts out saying that God is great and generous but ends by saying that God is so generous that He gave him an illness. The ironic humor of Löwy`s statement is understandable through the context of his letter, and his written "gebt" instead of "gibt" hints at his pronunciation. However, the conveyance of a Yiddish or Jewish mode of intention through the imitation of Yiddish through grammar and pronunciation has its limits.

In an earlier letter dated November 5, 1912, early in his relationship with Felice Bauer, Kafka includes a long quote from Löwy, complete with grammatical and spelling errors, describing the road going to Bauer's home in Berlin:

> Von Alexander Platz ziht sich eine lange, nicht belebt Strasse, Prenzloer Strasse, Prenzlower Allee. Welche hat viele Seitengässchen. Eins von diese Gässchen ist das Immanuel Kirchstrass. Still, abgelegen, weit von den immer roschenden Berlin. Das Gäßchen beginnt mit eine gewenliche Kirche. Wi sa wi steht das Haus Nr 37 ganz schmall und hoch. Das Gässchen ist auch ganz schmall. Wenn ich dort bin, ist immer ruhig, still und ich frage, ist das noch Berlin (*Briefe an Felice* 75)

Examined purely in terms of grammar and vocabulary, this lively description could easily be dismissed as poorly written: Löwy uses *immer* incorrectly, *wi sa wi* somewhat awkwardly, and he uses the wrong adjective ending several times. However, there are several examples of Yiddish grammar and pronunciation as well as examples of poetic, antiquated German that would have interested Kafka.

There is one instance where Löwy follows Yiddish, rather than German, grammar rules. In "Prenzlower Allee. Welche hat viele Seitengässschen," Löwy places *hat*, in the second position and separates Prenzlauer Allee from the dependent clause with a period (German: Prenzlauer Allee, welche viele Seitengässchen *hat*). According to Dovid Katz, in his book *Grammar of the Yiddish Language*: "The inflected verb usually follows the relative [pronoun] and is thus maintained in second position within the relative phrase" and the relative pronouns in Yiddish can either be un-inflecting, *vos* (סאָוו), or inflecting, *velkher* (רעכלעוו)[7] (245). By following Yiddish grammatical rules, this

replicates how a native-Yiddish speaker would speak German and allows for a Yiddish mode of intention to shine through.

Löwy has two instances of more poetic elements in this text. The sentence "ich frage, ist das noch Berlin" uses a stylistic device from 18th or 19th century German: *Fragen* in German can be either reflexive, you ask yourself something (i.e. ich frage *mich*), or a simple transitive verb if you are asking someone a question (i.e. ich frage *den Mann*). Löwy describes the road that Bauer lives on as 'weit von den immer *roschenden* Berlin" (emphasis added). Löwy's *roschend* is most likely either a misspelling of either *rauschend*, *glittering* or *resounding*, or from *rauschen*, (nominalized *das Rauschen*, *hissing* and *whooshing*). It is also related to the Yiddish *royshend* (רנעשיור), *rushing*, strongly suggesting that Löwy wanted to portray Berlin as a busy city whooshing or rushing by. These rhetorical flourishes make the text more interesting to read and reflect the older form of German that Yiddish more naturally evolved from and still harkens back to for Kafka.

This passage is an example of how a native-Yiddish speaker, specifically Löwy, speaks German, integrating Yiddish and archaic German elements into his writing. It is similar to Walter Benjamin's concept of translating *wörtlich*, which promotes keeping the grammatic structure of the original text in the translation to allow the pure language to come through in the foreign sentence structure. Benjamin writes: "hinsichtlich der Syntax wirft jede Sinneswiedergabe vollends über den Haufen und droht geradenwegs ins Unverständliche zu führen" (20). However, it does not necessarily convey a Yiddish worldview and this reliance on Yiddish-inflected German can lead to difficulties in understanding.

Kafka notes, with a certain smugness, in a later letter to Felice, that he was uncertain what exactly Lowy had written in another letter: "Hast Du eigentlich den Brief des Löwy, den ich Dir für Sonntag schickte, lesen können? Er spielte Sonntag in Berlin, wenigstens glaube ich es aus dem Brief herauslesen zu können, [...]" (Briefe an Felice 281). The "slight tone of superiority" that Beck notes from Kafka regarding his "genuine concern" about Löwy's business dealings (87) is also revealed in his quotations of and comments on Löwy's writing. Yildiz correctly states that while Kafka "identifies the German language as the law, he himself is the one who repeatedly guards its boundaries" and balks at the inclusion of foreignness (61). Despite Kafka's genuine excitement for Löwy's unabashed expressions of Jewishness, it does not agree with Kafka's view of himself as protector of the German language, a role he performed even when he was excited by Löwy's creative use of grammar.

In a letter to Max Brod dated September 1917, Kafka discusses proofreading an article Löwy had written for the magazine *Der Jude*. He only mentions a single line: "frackierte Herren und neglegierte Damen", which Kafka finds "excellently put" (Kafka, *Briefe* 173, Letters 148). Löwy creates the neologism *frackiert* by turning the noun *Frack* (tuxedo) into a verb, *frackieren*, and then turns the verb into an adjective. "[T]he form itself follows the grammatically correct act of transforming verbs into adjectives. [That is,] the morphology is correct, but not the word to which it is applied" (Yildiz 60). While Kafka appreciates Löwy's playful adaptation of German grammar, he states: "the German language balks" and Kafka has to "polish" the grammar (Kafka, Briefe 173, Letters 148).

Before moving on to "Vom jüdischen Theater", in which this polished line appears, it is important to see how Kafka expresses a Jewish worldview in his own writings. In his early mature works, Kafka began to focus exclusively on showing a Jewish mode of intention through context rather than grammar. In Kafka's short story "The Judgement", Georg interprets his father's judgement, "Tod des Ertrinkens" (death by drowning), literally as a legal pronouncement. His inability to see the mode of intention of the phrase as a Jewish curse or oath, and not as something to be taken literally, results in his

death. To demonstrate the impossibility of translating from Yiddish to German, Kafka, in his speech, states: "'Toit' [YIVO – toyt] z. B. ist eben nicht 'tot' und 'Blüt' [YIVO – blut] ist keinesfalls 'Blut'" (Rede 425). As Liska notes in her book *When Kafka Says 'We'* "The umlauts in the Yiddish Blüt and Toit inevitably 'twist' and soften the pathos-filled sound these words have in German" (31). Suchoff convincingly demonstrates that the father's sentence of "Tod des Ertrinkens" in 'The Judgement" is given in the sense of a *Klole* or curse or oath, which is meant to express frustration and not to be taken literally as Georg does using *Amstdeutsch*, reflecting Kafka's training in the Austro-Hungarian legal system (Jewish 77-78). While both *toyt* and *tot* literally mean "death," the way the father uses the sentence of death, in a Yiddish tradition, and how the son interprets it, in a German or legalistic framework, are completely different. It is the linguistic similarities between *toyt* and *tot* that mask their different intentions and allow the German mode of intention to dominate. Georg could not interpret the curse as anything but literal as German is the dominant language.

Themes from Yiddish theater and culture reappear unmarked throughout Kafka's works, lying, as Kagan states "underneath the German" to be found by those who know what to look for (173). As Harman notes, Kafka described Oswald in *The Castle* as the "ewigen Landvermesser," a term associated with the "ewigen Juden (83). In her analysis of *The Castle*, Beck shows how Kafka chose the profession based on wordplay in Hebrew: the Hebrew words for land surveyor and messiah, *moshoak* and *mashiakh* respectively, are nearly identical (195). In his work, Kafka hides the Hebrew origins of the wordplay using the German translation of the words and avoiding any connection to the foreign. Another example of references to Jewish culture comes from "Forschungen eines Hundes," (1922), in which a group of dogs who are artists are referred to as *Lufthund*, *airdogs*, which plays on the Yiddish term *Luftmensch*, *airperson*, to refer to someone "without a definite business or income, someone who is a parasite to society and was often used by assimilated Jews to designate, and denigrate, lesser-integrated artists from Eastern-Europe" (Kager 173-75).

As has been shown, Kafka's works contain many references to Jewish culture, but these references are not direct, he seeks to hide these influences. The short piece "Vom jüdischen Theater" directly references Jewish culture and highlights the foreign elements within it. The work which appears in Kafka's *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente 1* is the unnamed article that Kafka edited for Löwy. It is written as a first-person narrative that recounts Löwy's early experiences with the theater. It begins when he first watches, enthralled as an uncle dresses up and performs during *Purim*, a Jewish holiday similar to Karneval. While Löwy is fascinated by the theater, his pious parents and other religious relatives forbid him to go, telling him that the theater is a sacrilegious place. As Löwy grows older he ventures out to the Polish opera and then later to the Yiddish theater in Warsaw, where he is captivated by the performances and being surrounded by bourgeois Jews. It concludes with his worried father warning him that the theater would take him far away.

In the scene describing Löwy's first visit to the Yiddish theater in Warsaw, the line "frackierte Herren und neglegierte Damen", discussed above (Kafka, *Briefe* 173), reappears in Löwy's article as: "Vor allem keine Herren im Frack, keine Damen in Dekolleté [...]" (Kafka, *Nachgelassene* 435). Here Kafka as an editor continues to guard the German language by removing the nouns that had been changed into adjectives and using the original nouns. He also replaced the original *Negligé*, a long dressing gown, with *Dekolleté*, a type of long evening dress, which makes the dress more appropriate for a bourgeois theater audience. This line shows that Löwy is excited to be among other Polish Jews of all walks of life at the theater and is fascinated by their clothing.

After Löwy's parents learn that he has been going to the theater, they have a serious talk with him, which is signaled using a play on two Hebrew words. Löwy writes of that moment: "Instinktiv fühlte ich, daß hier eine 'Kasche' für mich gekocht wird" (Kafka, *Nachgelassene* 436). This is a pun based on both *Kesche* (a religious question) and *Kasche* (buckwheat groats) being pronounced and spelled identically in Yiddish (קשאַק). A question is going to be cooked up for Löwy to find out if he was doing something that he had been forbidden to do. In contrast to the wordplay with *Lufthund* and the connection of land surveyor and Messiah, whose original meanings and connections in Yiddish and Hebrew are only suggest through German translation, this sentence uses the Hebrew word and connects a tradition of posing a religious question to the parents asking Löwy a tough question about his nightly visits to the forbidden theater.

The article contains other Yiddish as well as many non-German, Hebrew-derived words that are associated with Jewish culture such as *Purim*, *Rebbe*, and *Kaftan*, which Kafka retains without providing a translation for the words in the text or as a footnote. Except for the Yiddish *Rebbe*, rather than the German *Rabbi(ner)*, and the German-derived *Klaus* (a Talmudic school) the Hebrew-derived words are in quotation marks. Grossman notes that "[t]he small Hebrew-Aramaic component [of Yiddish] tends to occupy a higher register and to occur more in the discourse of religious study or intellectual writings specific to Jewish life" (From East 297). The Hebrew words cover a range of topics from the name of a holiday, common food and dress, as well as rules of religious life. When their son first expresses interest in the theater, Löwy's parents declare the theater to be "'trefe', nichts anders als 'chaser'" (Kafka, Nachgelassene 430). *Trefe*, is a term for food prohibited by Jewish dietary laws and *chaser*, *chazir*, is a word for pig or greedy person. *Chazir tref* together is a Yiddish phrase: meaning "as unclean as a pig," This puts the parents' disapproval of the theater in religious terms and is shown as a concept that does not have a German equivalent. In retaining the Hebrew-derived words, Kafka avoids what Grossman defines as "the need to translate the *cultural* discourse more than the language of the source into that of the target culture" (From East 290, emphasis in the original). As Grossman argues, including many Hebrew words "produces an exoticizing effect on the [German] language itself, producing a form of German unfamiliar even to most Jewish readers in early 1900s Germany" (From East 297). It also "partially replicat[es] what Max Weinreich called the 'fusion' structure of Yiddish, and produc[es] a sound-image resonant of, but not, Yiddish" (Grossman, From East 297). This fusion allows Kafka to retain the article's Yiddish context without sacrificing 'correct' German grammar.

In the final example, Kafka retains the word *Gedenk*, the imperative form of *gedenken*, to remember, which is an antiquated verb from Kafka's time. As has been shown, Kafka's long quote of Löwy contained some elements of antiquated and poetic German, which probably interested Kafka. At the end of the article, Löwy's father commands his son: "Mein Kind, gedenk, das wird Dich weit, sehr weit führen" Kafka, *Nachgelassene* 436). This line conveys the father's concern for his son and captures his mode of speech, which for Kafka might connote how a Yiddish-speaker sounds in German. Most likely Löwy used this archaic word and Kafka left it in. Kafka's retention of poetic devices from the 18th or 19th Century that comes up in Löwy's article, suggests an interest in the older elements of German that Kafka associates with Yiddish when he says that the language developed more naturally from Middle High German than German.

In his 1912 speech on Yiddish, Kafka said that the listener should experience something of Yiddish culture through hearing it. Kafka uses several methods throughout his life to show the *Willkür und Gesetz* that he attributes to Yiddish in his works. While he first promotes showing it through imitating Yiddish grammar and pronunciation, he defers

to subtle references to Yiddish culture in his own writings. The direct references to Yiddish culture through the mixing of Hebrew words into German sentences in Löwy's article retains his authorial voice and allows the *Willkür und Gesetz* of Yiddish to shine through with the fusion of German and Hebraic elements. But it also allows precisely this *Komödie* of foreign elements, which made it impossible for Kafka to use in his own writing, in which he referred to Yiddish culture only indirectly.

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Notes

[1] Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's influential, though controversial, book Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature (1974) argues that Kafka's minor literature deterritorializes German; meaning that a minority group, in this case Jews, uses the major language to speak from their perspective, i.e. bringing the language to those outside the majority. In contrast, David Suchoff in his book Kafka's Jewish Languages (2012), shows that Kafka's use of Yiddish themes in German writing denationalizes the language, i.e., bringing foreign influences into German. I would argue that these are two separate aspects, though they are often combined in minor literature.

[2] The YIVO standard transliteration is Kinderlekh (קינדערלעך). Kafka spells Yiddish based on how it sounds.

[3] Bei manchen Liedern, der Aussprache „jüdische Kinderloch", manchem Anblick dieser Frau, die auf dem Podium, weil sie Jüdin ist uns Zuhörer weil wir Juden sind an sich zieht, ohne Verlangen oder Neugier nach Christen, ging mir ein Zittern über die Wangen" (Kafka, Tagebucher 59).

[4] Suchoff, in his book *Kafka's Jewish Languages*, takes another track when he argues that the German language would not allow the *Komödie* of foreign words or foreign concepts into it, denying the possibility of expressing a non-Christian sentiment through a Christian language (75).

[5] "Oder der Jargon entwickelte mittelhochdeutsche Formen folgerichtiger als selbst das Neuhochdeutsche; so z. B. ist das Jargon'sche ‚mir seien' (neuhochdeutsch ‚wir sind') aus dem Mittelhochdeutschen "sin" natürlicher entwickelt, als das neuhochdeutsche 'wir sind'" (Kafka, Rede 423).

[6] In a diary entry, Kafka writes that his father called Max Brod a "meschuggenen ritoch" (a crazy hothead), (Kafka, *Tagebücher* 214).

[7] "the poem, which the poetess wrote is very beautiful – דיל סאָד, עסטעאַפ יד רעכלעוו/סאָוו דעלכער iz zeyer ויש רעייז זיא וְבירשעגנאָ טאָה [dos lid, *vos/velkher* di poetese hot angeshribn iz zeyer sheyn]" (Katz 246).

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Translation Theory and Praxis in East and West: The Case of Saud Al-Sanousi's *Saaq al-Bamboo*

IBRAHIM BADSHAH

Abstract: Saud Al-Sanousi emplots his novel, *Saaq al-Bamboo* with instances that convey the plight of migrants with the process of translation becoming the trope via which it is elucidated; in an interesting synergy of the two. The novel is originally written in Arabic, but disguises itself as an Arabic translation of an autobiography written by the protagonist, in Tagalog/Filipino language. The author uses a fictional translator, language of translation, and large number of footnotes along with a translator's note in the beginning, as a stylistic technique to further his argument. The paper will try to closely analyze the unique narrative technique the author has adopted and its relation to the theme he engages with, i.e. migration, in an attempt to assimilate both the processes and look for theories that can be applied on both. The paper also intends to explore the politics of translation in East-West context emphasizing elements like choice of the text and changes in translation with regard to cultural hegemony of the West, based on a close scrutiny of the English translation of the said novel that omits the stylistic novelty of the text. It will also look into the freedom of the translator, juxtaposing the traditional notion of the original/translation binary and the new notions in translation theory that offer a claim of originality to the translated text. Moreover, based on a close examination of the Malayalam translation of the novel, it will undertake a thorough study of the practice of translation among Eastern languages as well paying attention to the concept of 'untranslatability' as well as the politics underlying translation practices. The study will question the universality of inherently Eurocentric translation theories and thus conclude by highlighting the need for a theory that deals with translation practices within the East as well.
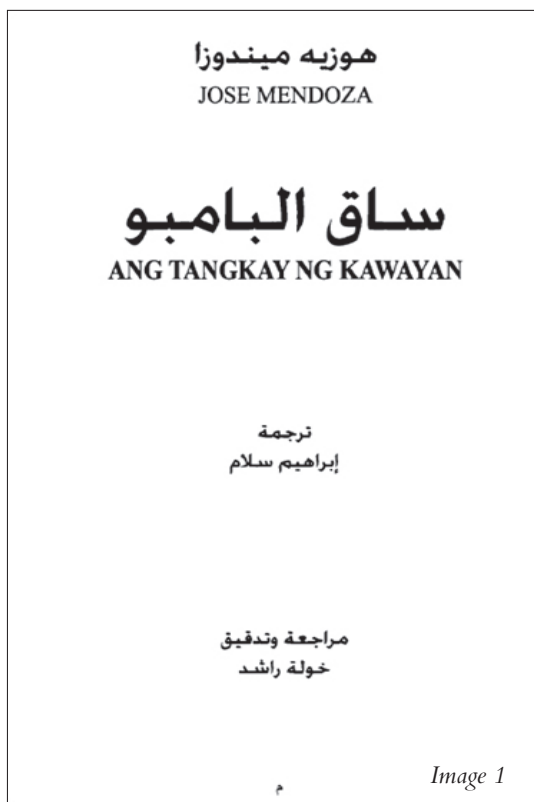
Keywords: Politics, translation, orient, untranslatability

In translation: The stylistic novelty of *Saaq al-Bamboo* and its implications for the text's thematic concerns

Kuwaiti novelist Saud Al-Sanousi's seminal work *Saaq al-Bamboo* (The Bamboo Stalk) won him The International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) also known as the Arabic Booker in 2013. The novel unfolds the life of José Mendoza, the offspring of a secret affair between a Filipina housemaid working in Kuwait and the only son of the house. Although the mother and child are sent back to the Philippines immediately after he is born, the boy returns to Kuwait as an adult as per the will of his father who has died by then. The novel deals with the complexities of a postcolonial world characterized by the presence of hybrid identities, as the protagonist finds himself in the problematic position as an Arab for the Filipinos and Filipino for the Arabs. In telling the tale of José, Al-Sanousi is also touches upon issues plaguing the postcolonial, globalized world, such as the Bidoon Crisis as well as the crises related to the creation of hybrid identities.

The novel confuses the readers with its innovative stylistics construed with its thematics, effectively fusing form and content. It is only at the end that the readers get to know

the full implications of the title page which attributes the authorship of the work to its protagonist. The title of the book appears in Tagalog as well as in Arabic, mentioning Ibrahim Salam as the translator and Khawla Rashid as the Editor. (Image 1). The readers are yet to emerge from the confusion they are thrown into when the next page opens to a translator's bio where Ibrahim Salam's life and works are detailed. The next two pages further this confusion as they explain the translator's method and opinion under the title 'Translator's note'. All of this ends with a dedication, where the names mentioned here appear later as the novel progresses. The novel is divided into six parts and all of them except the last one begin with a quote by José Rizal, a Filipino reformer. In addition, the novel has 38 footnotes, which are, as it has been stated in the translator's note, "given either by the author himself or the translator or the editor" (Al-Sanousi 11, my trans.). And in the end, the translator, Ibrahim Salam's address and contact number are given in a separate page, with no additional information about Al-Sanousi anywhere in the book other than his name appearing on the cover.

هوزيه ميندوزا
JOSE MENDOZA

ساق البامبو
ANG TANGKAY NG KAWAYAN

ترجمة
إبراهيم سلام

مراجعة وتدقيق
خولة راشد

Image 1

    At this juncture, all evidences point to the work being a translation indeed. However as the novel proceeds, we realize that the translator, the editor along with the people to whom the novel is dedicated, are all fictional characters who later appear in the novel. The translator's bio, his note and all the footnotes that appear in the book are the Al-Sanousi's craftsmanship that make it look like a translation of the autobiographical account of someone who underwent plenty of trauma because of the attitude of the Kuwaiti society. Even the quotes by José Rizal, the Filipino reformer, which appear at the beginning of each part of the novel create the impression that the book is penned by a Filipino author. Nadia Abdulwahab Khawandanah, in her "The Exile Homeland: Splintered Identity in Saud Al-Sanousi's *The Bamboo Stalk*" comments on this unique

style of Al-Sanousi saying that "the writer's inspired, pragmatic narrative technique… enriched realism profoundly in the novel and simultaneously, signified a sparkling originality in the narration" (Khawandanah 2). For Ali Al-Majnooni, this novel is "a text that performs translation. Its theme, topography, and narrative technique are spun around translation" (Al-Majnooni). That is to say that the author indulges in a creative reconstruction of a multi-layered translation in *Saaq al-Bamboo*.

The effort demanded by such a realistic portrayal of the process of translation can be gauged by the fact that in order to render such an innovation successful, the author has to do an internal translation in writing each sentence, i.e. to translate the idea into a foreign language and translate it back into Arabic. Even more commendable is perhaps the writing style of the novelist enriched with the Modern Standard Arabic or *fusha,* free from the influences of the regional dialects. At the same time, there is a visible influence of a foreign language which can be seen in the untranslated words and expressions including the one in the very title of the book. They leave finest brushstrokes of translation and enhances the realism in the novel. Realism has been indispensable to Arabic literature till now, and the literary quality of the text is measured by its portrayal of real-life events, making it important for Sanousi to bring it to the fore in his novel as well. Such a viewpoint is supported by Hani Elayyan who, quoting Sabry Hafez talks about "the lengthy preambles that the pioneers of Arabic fiction wrote to convince the readers the authenticity of the tales they told" (Elayyan 88). Quoting from the translator's note in *Saaq al-Bamboo* Elayyan says, "This preface is part of the novel's attempt to create complete make-belief" (Elayyan 89).

The narrative technique serves more purposes than one. It is perhaps to be noted that several migrant labourers in the Gulf countries are denied their basic human rights. In the novel, the protagonist's rights are violated because of the attitude of the civil society towards its migrants. Making the protagonist tell his own traumatic tale lends credence and authenticity to a crafted story. Moreover, Al-Sanousi, in a way, executes poetic justice by letting the protagonist tell his story without the interference of a narrator. Khawandanah's statement is relevant here:

> It is more than merely a novelty in Arabic literature; it is a very brave step to give the floor to a foreign voice to speak up his concerns. In short, to hear the Other, in his own words and ways of expression to relate his dilemma. The natives have had enough interference in the hero's life. It is time now to give him the chance to tell his version of his story (Khawandanah 3,4).

Another point here is about the text carrying a performative aspect of translation. This internal translation that happens in multiple layers is analogous to José's migration to Kuwait and going back to the Philippines, denoting the perpetual dislocatedness of narrative and the individual. This underlines the inherent relation between migration and translation. As Paul F. Bandia states, "Translation and the postcolonial migrant condition frequently share displacement or relocation as a defining attribute. In a metaphorical sense, translation can be described as a sort of wandering or nomadic existence of a text in perpetual exile." (Bandia 274) Hence, the author is attempting to portray the complexities of migration through the metaphor of translation. Al-Sanousi also underlines the untranslatability between languages by this unique narrative technique. The book's title itself is an example of the same.

The author's attempt at adding a foreign word, bamboo, in the title whereas there is actually an equivalent word in Arabic, khyzuran, which does make its appearance also in the novel, points to his intention of bringing to the fore the untranslatability of certain words and contexts, especially in the case of Kuwait and the Middle East in general. By doing this, Al-Sanousi is saying that the bamboo he is talking about is not

one from Kuwait, nor from anywhere in Arabia, but from a foreign country, which makes it difficult for it to grow in this language/culture/soil. This also reaffirms the parallels between migration and translation. José's moving from one culture to another is seen as being analogous to the process of translation of a text from one language to another. Applying the theory of translation on the politics of migration and cultural assimilation, the title can also denote the protagonist's inability to assimilate into Kuwaiti culture This is similar to what Guillermo Gómez-Peña's model of menudo chowder that Homi K Bhabha quotes, which affirms that the migrants cannot entirely be a part of the receptive culture, since there will always be 'stubborn chunks' that only float on the surface (Bhabha 218).

(In)Appropriation: The English translation of *Saaq al-Bamboo*

In 2015, renowned translator Jonathan Wright translated *Saaq al-Bamboo* into English as *The Bamboo Stalk.* The West's interest in the book however should be held suspect primarily because as Donya Tag-El-Din states "the West often consumes the East, not only in economic terms, but also consumes Eastern stories and creates literary discourses about the East, in order to perpetuate the myth of Eastern inferiority" (Tag-El-Din 22*). Saaq al-Bamboo* is a book that talks about the interaction between two cultural, racial and religious entities and the outcome of the said interaction in multiple layers. This, in a way, affirms the West's perception of the East as culturally intolerant, religiously extremist, racially arrogant and regionally proud. Narration of oppression and inequality in Arab society is a popular topic for western readers. And this book, for its portrayal of the inhuman treatment of the migrant laborers, for showing the microcosm of Arab society through the Al-Taroof household and for its showcasing of the controversies such as the Bidoon crisis, became appealing to the Western readership. One evidence for this claim lies in the blurb given in the English translation. The blurb at the back of the Arabic text presents an excerpt from the novel where the protagonist expresses his hope of becoming a bamboo which can grow under any circumstances, explaining the title while also providing for a realistic portrayal of the crisis faced by him. But the English translation's blurb summarizes José's mother's plight and goes on to talk about José himself. Dedicating three lines to say that "He is ill-prepared to plunge headfirst into a world where the fear of tyrants and dictators is nothing compared to the fear of 'what will people say?'" indicating the publisher's intention in turning the readers' focus to the value(less) system of the East where the society cannot thrive on its conscience alone. The concluding sentence says "*The Bamboo Stalk* takes an unflinching look at the lives of foreign workers in Arab countries and confronts the universal problems of identity, race and religion" making it seem like at the heart of the problem are foreign workers. This proves to be a false judgement, as we see other migrant laborers working in a better environment. The fictional translator Ibrahim Salam, who is also a Filipino living in Kuwait, is one good example. When José meets him for the first time he says: "Kuwait is wonderful… The people here are kind" to which José wanted to respond with "That's because you are not a Kuwaiti who looks like a Filipino." (Al-Sanousi 322)

Moreover, the crises of characters such as Merla and Ghazzan, who never engage in migration , are also highlighted to a great extent in the novel. Hence, it is clear that the crisis in the novel is not that of migrants, instead it is that of the ones who live with a fragmented identity. And by juxtaposing two characters, José and Merla, who undergo similar crises, where one is a migrant and the other a native, Al-Sanousi is, in a way trying to say that the problem is not that of migration and it doesn't matter if you are in your own country or outside, if you don't belong to a single race, religion or national identity, your fate will seal this crisis.

Apart from being blunt in the blurb, about the intention behind taking the novel for publication, the nature of the original book is technically changed in translation by omitting several paratextual elements which are central to the novel. To begin with, Wright omits the additional title page, relevance of which is already discussed in the paper. The translator's bio as well as the note have been omitted too, both of which are central to the understanding of the novel as a whole. Al-Sanousi adds the translator's note in order to explain the fictional translator's attitude towards the book, which can also be read as the author's emphasis on the fact that the following incidents are not his creation but that he is a mere chronicler. The method of translation that the note talks about charts the Al-Sanousi's idea of an ideal translation and translator. "Even though my real personality occupies a space in it, my duty in the production of this work is limited to transforming the words in the source text from Filipino Language to Arabic as per the request made by the author" (Al-Sanousi 11 my trans.).

Later, the note elaborately talks about untranslatability as well.

> Every language has its own special features. And each language is rooted in its own specific cultural milieu. Even though the cultures resemble one another, each one of them is distinct from the other for its unique features. Therefore, I came across a lot of Filipino words which do not have equivalences in Arabic; especially those that are specific to the particular region and society and cannot be seen in any other culture. Despite my proficiency in and love for Arabic, the language of the Holy Qur'an, I faced hardship in translating such words, making me translate a lot of phrases to something that stays closer to their literal meaning. Meanings of some terms can be understood from the context in which they appear. Others are explained in footnotes. Their abundance might surprise you. But the truth is that both the author and I \ were compelled to depend on them (Al-Sanousi 11, my trans.).

The last three sentences, denoting the importance of footnotes to the novel, require special attention. Translator's note ends with this note: "NB: All the footnotes that appear in this text which are not specifically mentioned as the translator's or the author's, belong to Miss Khawla Rashid who edited and revised this work" (Al-Sanousi 12, my trans.).

These two instances clearly underline the importance of the footnotes in the novel. This adds to the metanarrative style and enriches realism. Al-Majnooni opines that the footnotes impart crucial bits of information that provides context to the readers and also serve as reminders of the work being a "(fictional) translation". However, the translator deliberately omits these footnotes by incorporating them into the body of the text itself, stripping it of its stylistic complexity and nuance.

Surprisingly, the dedication page is not omitted in the English translation which might confuse the readers provided it is noticed. As already mentioned, the book is dedicated to five Kuwaiti youngsters, encountered by the protagonist first during their visit Philippines and later befriended during his stay in Kuwait. For anyone who reads the English translation and notices the similarity between the names in the dedication page and the names of the characters, this will remain a mystery; as the readers won't be able to find the reason behind these similarities anywhere in the English translation. In doing away with the narrative technique employed by the author his craftsmanship largely remains unacknowledged in this translation. Commentators of the English translation called it a novel in first person narrative where the protagonist recounts his trauma of being born to parents from two different countries, cultures and religions. However, all the commentators of the Arabic text talked extensively about the technique Al-Sanousi employed and its relation to the theme of the novel.

The ending of the novel however is more dramatic. The protagonist is watching a football game between Kuwait and Philippines live on TV. He can't take sides; thus he stops writing when both the teams are on a tie. The English translation ends there. But in the original text, the protagonist/author adds a final line as footnote.

"The game ended in favor of the Kuwaiti national team with a second goal scored by Waleed Ali at the 84th minute" (Al-Sanousi 396, my trans.). This implies the narrator's loyalty towards Kuwait. Even though José claims to be neutral regarding his loyalty , the author leaves hints to point it out. This is evident in his comment when Filipino team scores their first goal and feels that he scored an own goal. José leaves the hall feeling relieved when the Kuwaiti team scores their first goal. The omission of this detail in the English translation results in a change of the idea it represents.

Poor (?) Saud: On translating the Orient

What is it that makes the translator modify the text to such an extent? Does the west think that innovations from the East are either not presentable enough or not acceptable? Or, does the western translator/editor/publisher find it irrelevant to include the finest details the author is trying to include in the book, because the reason why he is doing so has more to do with the 'toxic realism' in Arabic Literary tradition, where they tend to blur boundaries between real and imagined, factual and fictional making genres overlap as mutually enabling categories?

Fahndrich's observations about west–oriented translation is important here. The readership of European languages, especially English, is much more than that of other languages. This makes it easier for the critics and readers to compare and comment on the translation of works originally written in English. But when it comes to translation from other languages, such as Arabic, to English, the readers are compelled to put their trust on the translators (Fahndrich 96). This also grants them absolute freedom in translation. And this freedom along with the ideas of western supremacy, hegemony of the west and 'inefficient orient' make it a fatal combination.

RHK Khalid Al-Omary says: "[T]here appears to be unanimous agreement that Oriental literature in translation in general is subordinated in the West… In their generality translated source texts are underestimated and even subjugated" (Al-Omary 283). And this should be read in relation with the hegemony of the west. Edward Said points out while talking about the 'representations',that the Orientalism undertakes through the depiction of the Orient:

> The things to look at [in these representations] are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, not the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original. The exteriority of the representation is always governed by some version of the truism that if the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job, for the West, and faute de mieux, for the poor Orient (Said 21).

While Said here talks about the texts that depict the Orient, this can be applied on translations too, beginning from the choice of texts, method of translation and the freedom the translator takes to "correct" the original. Samah Selim, while talking about Arab modernity, voices a similar concern, quoting from Tejaswini Niranjana's Siting Translation, that "translation is theorized as 'a technology of domination' imposed to 'discipline and regulate' the subaltern" (Selim 15). Mahasweta Sengupta in her essay "Translation as Manipulation" talks about how the texts were rewritten by the dominant powers, denuding "them of their complexity and variety" and presenting them as "specimens of a culture that is 'simple', 'natural'…" (Sengupta 160). For the translators of Arabic texts, Orient is, borrowing Al-Omary's words, "something that is difficult, obscure, mysterious and even inferior, [which is implied] in the way western translators deal with the cultural, literary and linguistic input the literary texts have" (Al-Omary 283-284) Said's recounting of the response he got from New York publisher calling Arabic "a controversial language" underlines the same idea (Said, 2001). And

the perception of the West about Orient works its way into translations as well. As Al-Omary puts it, had there been a better image, these translators would have dealt with these texts with more respect (Al-Omary 284) in complete contravention to what happens in the English translation of *Saaq al-Bamboo*, making the adjective Said used to depict the Orient perfectly fit the author, poor Saud Al-Sanousi.

Al-Toma's commentary on Wickens's opinion that most of the Arabic literature is "little but a servile imitation of the worst features of our modern literature" is very important when we look into the 'modification' that Wright has made in his translation of *Saaq al-Bamboo*. For him, this comment is an outcome of his familiarity (or unfamiliarity) with Arabic literature only through translations (Al-Toma 164). Another side of the politics of translation; the politics of censorship works here. Al-Omary observes, "Arab writers who promoted the West and its cultural values in their writings are placed in the front… [T]hey were encouraged by western prizes for the same reason at large. Till this date, the first decade of the third millennium, the Arab Orient is placed literarily and culturally under the same politics of perception and representation" (Al-Omary 288).

This is how the narrative of Arabic being the imitation is developed. West maintains their standards in choosing the text that needs to be translated. Then, the Orient centric elements in these chosen texts are omitted and standardized in translation as per the literary practices in the West, as it is evident from the case of *Saaq al-Bamboo*. After undergoing these multi layered process, there will be very little that differentiates these literatures from that of the west. Hence, this leads to the conclusion of them being an imitation.

The intention behind erasing these stylistic elements in translation was perhaps to make it easier for the target readers to read and comprehend. Even though, many translation theorists approve of this assimilation and homogenization, in the East-West context, it should be held suspect because of the percolation of power dynamics into the practice and the inclusion of 'oriental' stereotypes it entails. Numerous theories assert the translators' moral responsibility towards the readers of the translated text. Susan Bassnett argues that the translator cannot be the author of the source language text, hence, determining the original intention of the author is impossible. And the moral responsibility vested on the translator is limited to the target readers (Bassnett 23). While the translator does have a moral responsibility towards their readers in that they should make the text comprehensible and enjoyable to them, it should not happen through absolute assimilation. Translation as a practice is steeped in an acknowledgement of diversity and a respect/reverence for it, and it paves way for an interaction of the differences in a way that is mutually enabling to the participating elements. This mutual enabling can only happen when the individual elements retain their crux even while morphing into something different, without having to sacrifice themselves in the name of assimilation (Ribeiro). Such a feeling of mutual reverence is what fosters processes such as globalization, cosmopolitanism and the multiculturalism. The world, even as a 'single entity' is not a homogenized one, as Arjun Appadurai puts it. Instead, it is "a complex, overlapping, disjunctive" cultural economy the new world is creating (Appadurai 217) making the translators' moral responsibility the production of texts that retain traces of the original by sticking to the ethics of understanding differences.

Origin(al) Tales: Translation theories and the claim of originality

Here, it is imperative to note Karen Emmerich's views on the 'original', which gives an entirely different color to the concept. The relevance of her conceptualization is pertinent in the context of the views she expresses combined with the hegemony of the west which is potentially harmful to the literary tradition of the Orient. The central idea of her *Literary Translation and the Making of Originals* (2017) is to invert

idea of the original by claiming 'originality' of the translation and proving the absence of a stable original. The foundation of the argument rests on the possible differences between the translations of the same texts done by different people. This is followed by a statement that says "[t]he entire translation is a text that didn't exist before: all the words are added; all the words are different. A translation adds a new iteration, in a different language, to the sum total of texts for a work" (Emmerich 1-3). These two premises assert the originality of the translated works, without taking the ideas underlying the text itself into consideration. Even if seventy different translators give seventy different outputs, the meaning underlying all of them will be more or less the same. And the ones that present an entirely different meaning should be labelled as 'mistranslation' or 'failed translation', a term Emmerich finds baseless. Even if the translated text had not existed before, the content of the text, which is unique and unprecedented is always already there. For Emmerich, translation is an iteration of an unstable, indeterminate text. And in order to support this argument she talks about the texts with multiple versions. The Thousand and One nights, Franz Kafka's texts and even Virginia Woolf's novels are highlighted as examples for source texts having multiple unstable versions. But in such times of advancement, in publishing industry, where every text has single authentic versions, this point doesn't seem valid. Even if we consider there are multiple versions, the one published by the publisher who holds the copyright can be taken as the authorized one. Emmerich rejects this possibility by bringing the example of her experience in translation and generalizing it (Emmerich 5). Proving the instability of the source text in a way proves the inefficiency of the source text to be the original. This directly approves all (mis)translations to be original. Another aspect is that of the West realigning the Orient or addressing its fissures. This gives absolute freedom in the hands of the translator to add to, subtract from and change what is there in the source text.

By dismantling the concept of the supremacy of original, Emmerich critiques the concepts of faithfulness and equivalence. Contractual terms that demand 'faithful' translation are criticized too. However, given the freedom the translator will possibly take, such contractual terms and the verification of their execution are necessary in the field of translation. Emmerich's blind dismissal of the concept of faithfulness can be countered with Matthew Arnold's words that Andre Lefevere quotes "the translator's 'first duty is to be faithful'" even though he expresses confusion in defining this faithfulness (Lefevere 59). Faithfulness does not mean that every word in the source text should be translated into the target language in exactly the same way. Instead, the translated text should aim to retain the nucleus of the source text.

Lefevere's Translation/History/Culture engages with some important texts that talk about translation- a collection of prefaces the translators wrote to their translations. Nicolas Perrot d'Ablancourt, whose translations were first to be commented as 'beautiful but unfaithful' admits the infidelity he indulges in during translation and justifies it by saying "…I am the less to blame in that I have left out what was too filthy and softened what was too free…". Stating a long list of elements that he thinks outdated or were irrelevant to his target audience, he says: "I had to change all of this accordingly if I wanted to produce something that is pleasing" (qtd. in Lefevere 36). Another controversial comparison he makes at the risk of sounding irrational goes as follows.

> When you look at a beautiful face you will always discover some feature in it which you wish were not there. Similarly, the best authors contain passages that need to be touched up or clarified, certainly when I do not always stick to the author's words, or even to his thoughts (qtd. in Lefevere36).

This very problematic statement discounts the subjectivity of 'beauty', since something you find beautiful can be otherwise for someone else. Also, his not sticking to the author's

thoughts, renders the readers incapable of distinguishing between the author's and the translator's thoughts and ideas. By saying that he "considered what ought to be said… rather than what he actually said" (qtd. in Lefevere37) he also runs the risk of attributing ideas to the wrong person. To state it clearly, when a translator includes his ideas and replaces what the author says with his own, he is attributing the ideas to the author and claiming their authenticity through the reputation of the author. And by saying that he has done this, he is making it more complicated to the readers, who are then placed between a heap of ideas, both the author's and translator's, unable to distinguish between them.

Even though, Ablancourt admits that what he produced was not a translation, his method along with that of similar translators, who take the freedom to create adaptations of works rather than their translations, was adopted by a host of critics for formulation of variegated theoretical foundations. It is based on similar readings that Andre Lefevere radically reformulated translation as rewriting. But as Samah Selim says "Lefevere's definition of translation blurred the boundaries between translation and adaptation (where does the one end and the other begin?)" (Selim 17). This encapsulates the problems of Ablancourt's translation as well as other similar translations where faithfulness is not maintained.

When Orient translates the Orient

My translation of *Saaq al-Bamboo* to Malayalam was completed in 2016. And I want to take it as an example for the Orient translating Orient in the context of the politics of translation. Judging by its characteristics, this can be categorized as an activist translation that Samah Selim talks about in detail, referring to Richard Jacquemond, who presents it as a practice that stands in opposition to the institutionalized translation (Selim180). In such a translation, the translator overrides the norms – that include its marketability – to represent the text with an intention to bring out the meaning more clearly. Being faithful to the text implies a passion to convey the meanings as accurately as possible while striving to preserve the effect created by the original. Such a process involves harboring a love and respect for both the author as well as the text, such that the translator is open to it and surrenders himself to it. As Spivak says, "Unless the translator has earned the right to become the intimate reader, she cannot surrender to the text, cannot respond to the special call of the text" (Spivak 183). This act of intimate reading is the first step towards establishing a connection with the text prior to translation. And when the Orient translates the Orient, such a process is easily facilitated due to centuries of mutual interactions.

Malayalam and Arabic has a history of exchanges, that dates back to the pre-Islamic era. With the advent of Islam, it grew stronger, necessitating the birth of a new language; the Mappila language also known as Arabi-Malayalam. The Gulf Boom or the Gulf migration of Keralites following the discovery of oil, is similar to the *Nahda* in Egypt in terms of bringing modernity, except that the delegation sent from Egypt to Europe was in search of wisdom, whereas the Gulf delegation from India was looking for financial gains and the prosperity later brought renaissance in the Indian state of Kerala making it the only state in India with 100% literacy rate. On the other hand, as "the Orient is an integral part of the European material civilization and culture", (Said 2) India and other third world countries in Asia are integral part of the Gulf civilization. Hence, the Gulf for Indians, or Keralites is what Europe is for the Arabs in the ladder of cultural hierarchy and vice versa. And the same makes it easier for a translator to surrender to the text as Spivak suggests.

Translation has never been a mere linguistic act of transferring meaning from one culture to another. It is a very political act, beginning with the translator's choice of texts to the actual process of translation. This rings true for translation of Arabic texts

to Malayalam as well, which cannot be seen as mere instances of cultural exchange. Underlying it is deep-rooted politics. Mubashir P, in a paper titled "Tarjamatar-riwayat war-riwayaat al-mutarjamamin al-lughat al-Arabiyyaila al-lughat al-malybariya" (Translating novels and Malayalam translations of Arabic novels) enlists 23 novels translated from Arabic to Malayalam. These are majorly novels from Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, Tunisia, Egypt etc. all of which either depict the crises in the territory or the subversion of the image of Arabs represented by the wealthiest Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar etc. The choice of texts is important because the translators' attempt is to deconstruct the popular notion existing among Muslims unfamiliar with Arabic, that the Arabic language is a sacred language and the sum total of Arabic literature is constituted by the religious texts. Until the translation of Sayyidaat al-Qamar by Jokha Al-Harthi got Man Booker International, a wide majority was unaware of the fact that such women writers and female representations exist in Arabic literature. Hence, the translations of Arabic novels that appeared in Malayalam can be seen as an attempt to modify the ready association of Arabic language and literature with Islamic culture and literature. And this understanding is relevant in India, where Arabic is taught in more than 20,000 madrasas (Khan 73) and 25 universities including 11 central universities, the non-Muslims learning Arabic constitute less than 0.1% of the total population. That is to say, if you take 1000 students learning Arabic in India, the chances are very less that you will find one non-Muslim among them. Hence, the translators are in a way trying to show the rich literary tradition to the people of their countries.

The relevance of exhibiting this rich tradition owes its origin to the rampant Islamophobia which misconstrues both the religion as well as its followers. Within such a context, the Arab world still remains as a conservative, closed community that oppresses women and religious minorities and unapologetically violates human rights. Every attempt to translate Arabic literature into Indian languages, especially to Malayalam, is therefore, an attempt at a redefinition of what constitutes the thematic bulk of Arabic Literature. . Since it is a political activity, that serves a purpose higher than mere transmission of meaning from one language to another, this can be called as an activist translation. These works underline that feminism/s, communism, revolutionary ideas and progressive thoughts exist in Arab World too. The translators find it their duty to translate them, primarily because of their religious affiliation, which links them with the Arab world given the history of the religion. Secondly, because of their commitment towards the Arab world, which has been crucial to their financial growth and development. It is true that the expatriates who live/d in Arab countries express a kind of dual nationalism, one towards the country they trace their roots to, and the other that fed them and their family. These commitments enable them to translate the texts without appropriations and modifications. This is evident in Malayalam translation of *Saaq al-Bamboo*. Though the structure of the Arabic text is confusing, it is maintained in the Malayalam translation by including the fictional translator's note, his bio and footnotes as they appear in the original.

In terms of the faithfulness, there are contractual terms which the translator is supposed to strictly follow, failing which there is bound to be a legal action against him/her. The contracts include terms like "No additions, deletions, abridgements or alterations in the text, photographs or titles may be made without the prior written approval of the Author." But there are things these terms can't clearly cover. And translator has the duty of making the text enjoyable for the target readers. Andre Lefevere, in the introduction of his Translation/ History/ Culture, talks extensively about this conflict.

> Rather than leaving "the reader in peace as much as possible," and "moving the author towards him," thus naturalizing what is foreign, the translator should in Schleiermacher's

opinion leave "the author in peace, as much as possible," and "move the reader towards him." A translation should therefore sound "foreign" enough to its reader… (Lefevere 5)

Quoting Goethe, he refers to these kinds of translations as Critical translations, which are produced only to be read side by side with the original. This is one extreme end of translation in terms of faithfulness, which Lefevere says has ceased to exist (Lefevere 5). Lawrence Venuti observes that by foreignizing, the ethnocentric violence in translation practices can be restrained in comparison to the domestication, where the ethnocentric values are largely reduced (Venuti 29). The other extreme is the one which has been discussed earlier, proposed and carried out by Ablancourt and the likes. However, what is desirable in a translation is a moderate approach in which the translators stick to the ideas the original puts forward and renders them in a language that matches the beauty of the original. Where the author uses sophisticated language with embellishments, the translator has to use the same language and create a similar effect. That is the only way to fulfil the translator's duty towards the author as well as the target readers. Lefevere uses this metaphor "a sculptor imitating the work of a painter" to explain this point as well as to establish the creativity of the translator (Lefevere 12). Elliott Colla refers to Silverstein's term 'transduction', which is a process of conversion where it is compared to converting energy of wind or water to Electricity (Colla 316).

Though the Orient shares a relatively similar culture, Arabic is still notoriously untranslatable for many Eastern languages. Starting from the letters, 12 letters in Arabic alphabet don't have equivalent sound representation in Malayalam, which makes it difficult to transcribe names of the characters and places. Even the letters, which have similar representation in English such as q and z, do not have a counterpart in Malayalam. And in a name like عزيزة (A'zeeza) which appears in the novel, Malayalam can only write it as അസീസ (Aseesa) in which even one sound cannot get an accurate representation.

In a multicultural society like Kerala, words such as mom, dad, grandfather, grand-mother, aunt etc. have numerous equivalents in use. But they differ from one religious community to another. For example, among Hindu community, the word for dad is acchan, among Muslims, uppa, vappa, uppachi and vappachi and among Christians appan and appachan. And they can never be used interchangeably. This goes for all terms that denote relationships and there are no 'standardized' words which can be used indiscriminately. This being said, let us come to the case of *Saaq al-Bamboo*, where we see a mix of religious identities and a complex structure of familial relationships. The protagonist's maternal relatives are Christians and paternal relatives are Muslims. This is never a problem in English, not even in Arabic. Now, overcoming this complexity requires training a close eye at the narrator. José has been living in a Christian environment for eighteen years. Even after coming to Kuwait, he does not get many chances for cultural interactions, which leaves no possibility for him to acquire 'Muslim' vocabulary. Hence, throughout the novel, he is supposed to stick to the vocabulary he obtained from his life in Philippines. Based on this, in Malayalam translation, the terms are translated in a Christian context using the words like ammachi(mom), appachan (dad), ammaama (grandma), appappan (grandpa)etc. This however only solves the problems encountered in the narration. However, in places where others are speaking, the terminology is based on their religious belongingness. One example will be José's interactions with his step sister Khawla. The terminology in her conversations is translated in a Muslim way using words such as uppa (dad), vallyumma (grandma) etc.

Translation practices in the East

In *Saaq al-Bamboo*, we come across the fictional translator, Ibrahim Salam. He is a Filipino, whose mother tongue is Tagalog, and who learned Arabic as a foreign

language. This is a common practice in translations between minor and major languages, oft encountered in third world countries, where this hierarchy is more evident than anywhere else. By employing such a translator, Al-Sanousi is also hinting at translation practices within the East. Hence, the 'Translator's note' that talks about how the translator is a mere vehicle to carry the meaning from source language/culture to the target language/culture denotes the attitude of the Orient who is translating the Orient.

Malayalam is not different in this case. Despite centuries of cultural and linguistic interactions, there is not a single text translated from Malayalam to Arabic by an Arab. Arabs already had a cultural capital for being the center of the Islamic tradition. With the discovery of oil, their financial prosperity entailed a hold over the East. Arabic language had already become popular in many of these countries and this led to the larger readership of Arabic literature. However, unlike the West, which systematically asserted their superiority over the Orient, Arabs did it in a passive tone by not looking into other cultures and subtly creating the narrative of the others being culturally as well as economically insignificant.

So far, seven Malayalam novels have been translated into Arabic. Two of them were translated from English by Arab writers. The remaining five were translated by Malayalam translators who learned Arabic as a foreign language. Saeed Hamadan, in an article titled "A case for translating Indian books into Arabic" talks about how Indian literature is entirely neglected in the Arab world, where Indian cinema on the other hand is widely popular. Mentioning the Arab publishing in India, he talks about translating from Indian languages, where around 90,000 books were published in 2013 (Hamadan). In "Why Malayalam fiction is being translated into Arabic?", Binu Karunakaran quotes the translator of three notable works into Arabic, Suhail Abdul Hakeem who asks: "What do the people in Arab countries know about us apart from as economic immigrants in search of work?" (Karunakaran) This distorted image of Indians has a lot to do with the lack of their representation in the world of literature. And on this, Karunakaran quotes Mona Kareem to say that "Arabic publishers are doing nothing to challenge the status quo, they are still obsessed with western literature" (Karunakaran).

Here, translation of Orient by Orient goes against the popular notion of the translation as a representation of the other. As Lefevere puts it "[t]he translator should know the language of the author he translates to perfection and that he should have achieved the same excellence in the language he wants to translate into" (Lefevere 27). Naturally, as the author is writing in her native language, the translator will be a native of the target language. Hence, it becomes a representation of the other in their own language. However, in case of translating to Arabic, as we have seen, the translators are majorly non-Arabs, making the act of translation, a self-representation in another language/culture.

Loredana Polezzi in "Translation and migration" (2012) talks about how the migrants expressing themselves in the host language can be seen as self-translation, in which she includes the translation of works done in one's mother tongue being translated to host language as well as the mental translation they necessarily have to do, while writing directly in a language other than their mother tongues (350). This is similar to a minor language speaker translating literature from her mother tongue to a major language. Even the motives behind these two actions – to be read and known in the host language – are identical. Here, self is not taken as an individual, but the member of the community as a whole. An author writing in third person narrative is also well suited to the said idea. Taking the example of Aadujeevitham, where Benyamin narrates the experience of Najeeb, the protagonist who migrates to the Middle East. When Suhail Abdul Hakeem translates it into Arabic as Ayyamul Maiz, he is still portraying Najeeb's life, but through Benyamin's words. When the book reaches the Arabs in Arabic, it

is Malayalis expressing themselves in the host language, which brings the author and translator to the same layer, if not same individuals, hence making it a self-translation. This can be assimilated with the fictional translation in *Saaq al-Bamboo*.

Conclusion

This paper analyzed the contrast between two translations of a novel originally written in Arabic. One, translated into a Western language by a western translator, with some appropriations and modifications in order to make it fit the taste of the desired readership, and the other, translated into an Eastern language, emphasizing the accuracy. As translation is not a neutral, apolitical act of transmitting the meaning, the paper looked into the politics that resulted in the translation practices that guided each of them. Closely examining the translation theories that talk about the political aspect of translation and examining their applicability to the text the paper dealt with, the existing translation theories that appear to be Eurocentric. It contended that these theories cannot be applied to the translations that happen between Eastern languages.

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Translation as Mirroring: Untranslatability and How to Deal with It

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Abstract: In this essay, I will focus on translation as a cultural appropriation. I argue translation could be a philosophy which has a built-in anxiety for questions, and it could also be a transfiguration *from* and *for* literature, which tries to respond to questions but never intends to fully answer them. When so many people have already discussed either the absence or presence of translation and translators, I would rather focus more on how the metaphor of 'mirror' helps us see translation as both absent presences and present absences. In my eyes, the gap between original texts and translation versions, and the attempt to fill in the gap are both beneficial, which contribute immensely to the comprehension of different aesthetics and value judgements. I will put forward some further questions about untranslatability in the concluding part.

> *His conception of his private and uniquely interesting individuality, together with his impulse to reveal his self, to demonstrate that in it which is to be admired and trusted, are, we may believe, his response to the newly available sense of an audience, of that public which society created.* (Trilling, 1972, p. 25)

Translation studies have always been haunted by two key questions: Can translations cross borders? Why do we need to read translations? When Auerbach (1969) says, 'in any event, our philological home is the earth: it can no longer be the nation' (p. 17), world literature both as a discipline and a practice has demystified itself before us. And in the meantime, we begin to realize that translations play a very important role both in helping us to reach out across time and space to others, and hastening the approach of *Weltliteratur* (World Literature). However, the two questions remain unanswered. This essay will try to respond to the questions by bringing my own observations of translation studies, and Western and Chinese literary traditions into a further discussion, which include the following aspects: something lost and something gained through the loss in translation; translation and the comprehension of other aesthetics and value judgements; translation as mirroring which reflects both ourselves and others; untranslatability and how to deal with it.

Loss and Gain of Translation

Auerbach once said that 'the most priceless and indispensable part of a philologist's heritage is still his own nation's culture and language' (Auerbach, 1969, p. 17). As a Chinese, I am deeply enchanted by the exuberant vitality and imaginations embodied in traditional Chinese culture, especially its ancient poetry and philosophical aesthetics. Regarding these masterpieces as not what merely belong to my own nation, I am eager to know how they travel to other parts of the world through translation.

I referred to *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*, and noticed that three ancient Chinese philosophers were included in the book under the title of *Early Chinese Literature and Thought.* They are Confucius (551-479 B. C. E.), Laozi (sixth-third centuries B. C. E.) and Zhuangzi (fourth-second centuries B. C. E.). I found out that some translations

could be misleading. I will firstly take Laozi's book, *Daodejing* as an example. Several chapters of the book are chosen in the anthology to represent Laozi's key thoughts, and each chapter is entitled by the first line which begins it. Chapter one is entitled 'The way that can be spoken of'. And the whole sentence means 'if *Dao* can be spoken of, then it is not constant *Dao*'. Firstly, *Dao* could mean 'the way', but is much richer in meanings. It can refer to either the path we walk on, or our modes of behaviour. Most importantly, it reflects a mixture of all the complex and profound meanings concerning how ancient Chinese think about life and death, constancy and mutability, interiority and exteriority. Chapter four is entitled 'The way is empty'. According to my understanding, what Laozi tries to emphasize is not the emptiness of *Dao*, but rather, *Dao* could not be contained within a certain sphere because it could float everywhere; *Dao* should not be embodied by something concrete because it escapes materialization; *Dao* may not be properly described, because it escapes all kinds of definitions in a wise way. 'Emptiness' might mean hollowness, or when used metaphorically, it can refer to someone who does not have enough capabilities to fulfil himself or herself. But maybe what Laozi aims at showing us is not the emptiness of *Dao*, but that *Dao* could be seen as an empty vessel which is filled by profundity, transcendence and the celestial spirit.

The translation of the title of chapter five is also misleading in my eyes. It is translated as 'Heaven and Earth are ruthless'. 'Ruthless' seems to carry with itself a rather negative meaning. For instance, we may describe a fate as ruthless, or we may want to use the word when we refer to a sudden deprivation of something precious from us by an unseen force. However, this may not be what Laozi truly means. What Laozi intends to convey could be that heaven and earth are not ruthless, but rather, impartial and impersonal, and therefore they can distinguish themselves from secular sentiments. Laozi's concept, 'impartiality', differs from philosophical aesthetics embodied in Confucius's *Analects* which focuses on *concrete* benevolence and kindness in a social community. Laozi attempts to jump out of these secular boundaries. He admires *Dao* deeply when it fulfils itself through impartiality and becomes the radiation of *transcendent* love and kindness. Chapter sixteen is entitled 'I do my utmost to attain emptiness'. But what Laozi truly means is 'I intend to attain the utmost *Dao*'. What Laozi emphasizes could be more about a real *Dao* distinguishing itself from *Dao* in common-sensical discourses, and an utmost degree, rather than the *process* of attaining *Dao* as suggested in this translation.

By referring to the above-said cases, I have discovered the loss and gain, the ambiguity, vagueness and incompleteness in translation versions of traditional Chinese philosophy. I want to know whether Chinese readers face similar situations when reading translations of English literature. George Eliot is one of my favourite authors in English literature. I like her *Middlemarch* in particular, especially because of the most beautifully ever-written words in chapter twenty of the book:

> Some discouragement, some faintness of heart at the new real future which replaces the imaginary, is not unusual, and we do not expect people to be deeply moved by what is not unusual. That element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency, has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of mankind; and perhaps our frames could hardly bear much of it. If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity. (Eliot, 2000, p. 124)

I referred to the Chinese translation version published by *People's Literature Publishing House* in 2006:

> "在新的真实的未来代替想象的未来时，心头产生一些失望，一些困惑，这并不是罕见的，既然并不罕见，人们也不必为此惶恐不安。接触频繁本身便蕴藏着悲剧因素，好

在它还无法渗入人类粗糙的感情，我们的心灵恐怕也不能完全容纳它。要是我们的视觉和知觉，对人生的一切寻常现象都那么敏感，那就好比我们能听到青草生长的声音和松鼠心脏的跳动，在我们本来认为沉寂无声的地方，突然出现了震耳欲聋的音响，这岂不会把我们吓死。事实正是这样，我们最敏锐的人在生活中也往往是麻木不仁的。"（项星耀（译）：《米德尔马契》. 北京：人民文学出版社，2006 年，第188页）
Xiang Xingyao trans, *Middlemarch.* Beijing: People's literature publishing house, 2006.）

If I re-translate the Chinese back into English literally, it would be 'when the new real future replaces the imaginary future, it is ordinary that people will feel a little bit disappointed and puzzled. Now that it is not unordinary, people do not need to feel upset about it. Our frequent attachments carry some tragic elements, and it is very good that they are not absorbed into people's coarse emotions. I am afraid our heart could not contain these emotions completely. If our vision and perception are so alert to all the ordinary phenomena in life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and it would certainly frighten us to death when we hear roaring sounds in the place supposed to be silent. This is the very fact we face, and the most acute people among us are usually very indifferent'. This translation version in my eyes reveals a completely different George Eliot, and a completely different *Middlemarch* through which George Eliot tries to both crystalize and mystify the subtleties.

George Eliot as I understand her, intends to say human beings may not have enough knowledge to fully absorb the concept of tragedy. Tragic elements could be pervading everywhere, which may include the moment when a newly-wed girl suddenly finds out that marriage is not something she previously imagined. Such is human nature that people will not be startled by something ordinary, and perhaps this is because the coarse emotions and expressions of mankind are not enough to carry the weight of burdens coming from both secular and imaginary world. And if we try to approach too close to some minute details hidden both interior and exterior, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, which will be too much for us to withhold. Those who walk quickly among us *choose* to be stupid towards all the roaring of subtle emotions. And because they get rid of these psychological burdens, they move relatively faster on the track. It is as if I could hear the melancholy, confusion and all the philosophical paradoxes within George Eliot, when she wrote down these words to try to express something inexpressible. The Chinese translation seems to sink all the subtleties into absolutes, which already represent a different narrative.

Paradox of Translation as that of the Language Itself

I happened to read Berthold Franke's comments on translation in an article entitled 'Why read translations? Or, why there is no borderless literature and why that is not bad at all'.[1] He firstly sees the problems not merely within the sphere of translation, but also literature in general. He begins by talking about previous criticism laid on translations, and then concludes,

> If we take the above-mentioned in regard to translations seriously, namely that their unconditional commitment to the source text, their fidelity to the original stands, always under the systematic reservation of possible failure, which means that the only chance of successful translation is the creative handling of this necessary aporia or internal contradiction, then this actually expresses not only the problem of translation alone, but the fundamental dilemma of literature itself.

These words are so powerful that I began to reflect on my own reading experiences accordingly. And I realize that when I read either ancient Chinese philosophy in my mother tongue, or George Eliot's *Middlemarch* in English, in fact I already translate them interiorly and unconsciously, just like how translators have projected their own

interpretations into literary texts and finally achieve a creative rebellion. There is something lost but also something gained through the loss in translation.

Berthold goes on arguing that not only the act of reading, but the act of writing also follows the same logic. Authors may want to use language to carry the weight of something transcendent, ungraspable and profound, but they can never totally achieve that. He compares this always-unachievable to *Paradise Lost* both as a literary term and a reality. He argues,

> Paradise, that is the innocence that results from the unity of creature and nature. This unity is lost forever with the fall of mankind, the human being becomes a cultural being, is thrown into civilization and language. And with this language it attempts, again and again and always in vain, to heal this loss.

Lionel Trilling mentions a similar point in *Sincerity and Authenticity* when he observes the phenomenon, 'down goes the audience, up comes the artist', as both drastic and paradoxical. He senses something 'gained through the loss'. Trilling argues, 'the loss of its Eden of gratified desire brings with it covenants of redemption and the offer of a higher, more significant life' (Trilling, 1972, pp. 97-98). Likewise, even though the loss in translations and language will be irretrievable, just like the lost paradise, our effort to reconstruct the original texts can breathe into them another sense of life. And any attempt to heal the loss will always be relevant, essential and worthwhile.

Berthold also describes the miraculous moment when readers finally understand most of the magic of literature and say in intense raptures, 'yes, precisely, that's it'. All previous ambiguities suddenly dissolve, and literary texts begin to ring a bell. His concluding remarks deem the paradox of literature as that of the language itself. He says, 'the paradox of literature is the paradox of language – to be both a border and a delimitation, freedom and isolation, a dead-end and a journey into the open, at the same time'. We should therefore embed the paradox of literature in our thinking patterns and behaviours by thinking paradoxically, which can not only revitalize our own literary tradition, but may also help us see translations with more tolerance and respect. Translations could at least enlighten more entryways into interpretations of literary texts, which would be beneficial.

Translators' Creative Rebellions

With this new perspective, I revisit the above-mentioned translation versions and they become wonderful examples of creative rebellions and cross-cultural communications. 'The way' may not be enough to describe the true essence of *Dao* in ancient Chinese philosophy, but it could also be a depiction of the incarnating process, which helps *Dao* reach out to people living afar more concretely. 'Empty' may be a wrong way of comprehending the exuberance of *Dao*, however, deeming *Dao* as exuberant is also my personal interpretation, even though I may share these thoughts in common with several others. Besides, we can also to some extent say, by categorizing *Dao* as empty, it is another wonderful embodiment of the paradoxical elements within *Dao* itself, which could be spiritually exuberant because of being materially empty, and which could be both near and far, present and absent, abstract and concrete, expressible and inexplicable. We never really know what is in a translator's mind, just like we can never totally understand an author's original intentions.

I then turn to English translations of *Zhuangzi* (fourth-second centuries B. C. E.). Chapter one is entitled 'Free and Easy Wandering'. 'Free' and 'easy' still seem rather westernized in describing the eternal mental bliss Zhuangzi tries to convey through his works. However, when I think of 'free' not only as a depiction of human rights

proposed by western reformers, but also as a floating spirit which could get rid of all the burdens and shadows, and 'easy' not only used to depict a western lifestyle but also a mental attitude, I feel peaceful. I also feel very grateful that my very reading of this translation version helps me jump out of my own cultural jargons, and then enrich the understanding of both my language and my culture.

Previously I might think of the translation of chapter two of *Zhuangzi*, 'Discussion on Making All things Equal' as a misunderstanding, because in original Chinese, what Zhuangzi emphasizes may be more about how we should *treat* everything in an equal way. He stresses more upon an attitude and a final choice we should cling to, rather than a concrete behaviour as suggested in 'making'. Zhuangzi thinks such an attitude will help deconstruct anthropocentrism and promote harmony among all creatures. But now I think the translation version also makes sense in Chinese contexts, because every effort to *make* things equal will help people eventually to *treat* things in an equal way.

When I now revisit the Chinese translation of *Middlemarch*, I feel peaceful again after I read through the whole book and find that at least key thoughts of the novel remain. It will always be difficult, or in most cases, in vain to translate the style, for instance, when Eliot uses a subtle way, while the translator chooses a style of 'absolute'. However, if we see from another perspective, it is just because 'style' could not travel entirely, needs to be transformed and then fits into a target culture through translators' own observations, that makes the process of translation so valuable, important and creative.

Translations of Different Aesthetics and Value Judgements

I begin to accept and understand that translations serve as crossroads in cross-cultural encounters, especially when nobody could ever claim to be masters of all existing language systems in this world. It is sometimes difficult to enter into a different value system, and we should therefore be grateful to translators' arduous efforts. Many aesthetics and philosophy unique to a nation are embodied in literary works and thoughts. And it is a translator's responsibility to make people in a target context share the uniqueness. In order to preserve the uniqueness well, translators must never be oblivious to the "otherness" of this language and culture that they are seeking to understand, while at the same time use creative rebellions in a proper way. A distinguished Chinese translator, Xu Yuanchong, exemplifies a translator's creative rebellion to the utmost, and is a master in both Chinese and English. I am particularly fascinated by how he translates the image of moon and wind which are used metaphorically in traditional Chinese poetry, and makes more western readers get to understand traditional Chinese aesthetics and how Chinese aesthetics might also be relevant to the literary traditions of their own.

In Chinese poetic traditions, poets like making use of scenery depictions to convey both subtle and concrete meanings. The image of moon and wind are among Chinese poets' favourites. Poets usually combine the gentle breeze and bright moonlight together in their poems. For instance, in *History of the South* (nan shi), the author uses the image of wind and moonlight to show a spiritual strength, and a perpetual longing for the nobility of mankind. 'Only the gentle breeze could reach where I dwell, and only the bright moonlight could accompany me when I drink wine' [2] (Li, 1976, p. 560). The following examples of ancient Chinese poems focusing on the image of moon and wind are all translated by Xu Yuanchong in the most creative way. I use them as case studies to show not only a translator's creative rebellion, but also how translations help people better understand different aesthetics and value judgements.

A famous Chinese poet, Yuan Haowen in Yuan Dynasty once wrote a poem, *Tune: Man and Moon (Moving to My Mother's East Garden)*, in which he describes the moon as bright and enjoyable, the breeze as light and refreshing.

> Hill on hill keeps apart the vanity fair / From this village of bumper year. / I move house to come near / The window-enframed distant hill/ And the pine-trees behind the windowsill. / I'll leave the woods and fields to the care / Of my children dear / So that I may do what I will. / Awake, I'll enjoy the moon so bright; / Drunk, the refreshing breeze so light. (Xu, 2008, *300 Yuan Songs*, p. 2)

In this poem, only the brightness of the moon and the lightness of the breeze can bring to the poet an eternal spiritual shelter. Xin Qiji, a poet in Song Dynasty also combined breeze and moonlight together in his poem, *The Moon over the West River*, to show how lovely a tender night could be.

> Startled by magpies leaving the branch in moonlight, / I hear cicadas shrill in the breeze at midnight. / The rice fields' sweet smell promises a bumper year; / Listen, how frogs' croaks please the ear! / Beyond the clouds seven or eight stars twinkle;/ Before the hills two or three raindrops sprinkle. / There is an inn beside the village temple. Look! / The winding path leads to the hut beside the brook. (Xu, 2006, *300 Song Lyrics*, p. 365)

A well-known poet, Su Shi, in Song Dynasty, who is famous for embodying a great artistic strength and a magnanimous mind in poetry and art, also refers to breeze and moonlight for a mental comfort. This poem is entitled *Courtyard Full of Fragrance.*

> For fame as vain as a snail's horn / And profit as slight as a fly's head, / Should I be busy and forlorn? / Fate rules for long, / Who is weak? Who is strong? / Not yet grown old and having leisure, / Let me be free to enjoy pleasure! / Could I be drunk in a hundred years, / Thirty-six hundred times without shedding tears? / Think how long life can last, / Though sad and harmful storms I've passed. / Why should I waste my breath / Until my death, / To say the short and long / Or right and wrong? / I am happy to enjoy clear breeze and the moon bright, / Green grass outspread / And a canopy of cloud white. / The Southern shore is fine / With a thousand cups of wine / And the courtyard fragrant with song. (Xu, 2006, *300 Song Lyrics*, p. 433)

The whole life may be a perpetual mutability, and people struggle for fame and recognition through their whole life-time. But if there could be something that alleviates the sense of solitude and anxiety, in Su Shi's eyes, nothing could be better than the moon hanging in the sky, or the touch of the breeze which could comb one's hair in the gentlest way. People all around the nation share the very same moon every night, and it can therefore in a metaphorical sense unite solitary people together. The gentle breeze can travel from one side of the world to another, and carries with itself well wishes from people we have not known from far away.

Wei Zhuang, a poet in Tang dynasty, makes use of the image of moon and breeze as concluding remarks for his entire poem, *Farewell to a Japanese Monk.*

> The land of mulberry is in the boundless sea; / Your home's farther east to the land of mulberry. / Who would arrive with you at the land of your dreams? / A sail unfurled in wind, a boat steeped in moonbeams.(Xu, 2006, *300 Tang Poems*, p. 131)

When Wei Zhuang waves goodbye to a friend, he borrows the metaphorical meanings of the moon symbolizing 'companion' and 'brightness to drive away darkness', and of the wind symbolizing 'a driving force for the ascendancy', which successfully changes emotions previously ungraspable into an artistic expression both transcendent and concrete. 'The land of your dreams' is added to the translation version by Xu Yuanchong, to rhyme with 'moonbeams'. And this alteration has changed the poem from aesthetics of realism to aesthetics of both realism and fantasy when it reaches its western audience.

In the above-mentioned examples, Xu Yuanchong is faithful to the essence of what traditional Chinese poems intend to convey, and at the same time deliberately deletes

or adds some parts to conform to rhymes in western poetry, such as the use of rhyming couplets. The image of moon and wind depicted in his translations are both fresh and familiar to me, which is due to both his faithfulness and rebellion. 'Loss and gain' could therefore not be a haunting problem that translation studies face, but rather, a translator's deliberate design or creative manipulations. Through Xu Yuanchong's translation, I feel the strength and beauty coming from both language systems, as well as a tendency for them to commingle. When I read how the moon and wind are embodied in these translations, it also seems to me as if another version of my favourite theme song, *Into the West*, in *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* were just by my ear.

> Lay down / Your sweet and weary head / Night is falling / You have come to journey's end. / Sleep now, / and dream of the ones who came before. / They are calling / from across the distant shore. / Why do you weep? / What are these tears upon your face? / Soon you will see / All of your fears will pass away / safe in my arms / you are only sleeping. / What can you see / on the horizon? / Why do the white gulls call? / Across the sea / a pale moon rises / The ships have come to carry you home. / Dawn will turn / to silver glass / A light on the water / All souls pass. / …

This epic song also refers to the moonlight. When the moon casts its dancing light on the water, all fears begin to vanish and pass away. Embedded in the solitude and serenity of the moonbeam, the boundary between reality and dreams is for this very moment blurred. Western poetic imaginations and Chinese traditional poetry commingle at this point, in sharing aesthetics regarding the moon, even though Chinese and western people may refer to the metaphor of moonlight quite differently in other literary texts.

  This discovery of the interrelatedness between Chinese and western literary traditions pushes me to reflect upon both with some further thoughts. In ancient China, when many scholars could not express their genuine emotions in a hostile political context, they refer to flowers and grass to convey a perpetual longing for a recognition, therefrom an expression, 'fragrant grass and the beauty' (*xiang cao mei ren*香草美人), is used to show ancient scholars' noble mind, patriotism as well as inner fear and desire. Some male poets compare themselves to flowers and beautiful women in the subtlest way. In western literary tradition, poets also make use of beautiful and profound metaphors, and Chinese therefore get to know Percy Bysshe Shelley by his *Ode to the West Wind*, and John Keats by his *Ode to a Nightingale.* Metaphors play a great part in shaping aesthetics and expressing the inexplicable. I really like the theme song, *When You Believe*, of the movie, *The Prince of Egypt*. Some of the lyrics indeed ring a bell, and from my perspective connect miraculously with what traditional Chinese poets intend to convey but can never convey to the utmost.

> Many nights we pray / With no proof anyone could hear / And our hearts a hopeful song / We barely understood / Now we are not afraid / Although we know there's much to fear / We were moving mountains long / Before we know we could /…/ When prayer so often proves in vain / Hope seems like the summer birds / Too swiftly flown away / And now I am standing here / My heart's so full I can't explain/ Seeking faith and speaking words / I never thought I'd say…

As is conveyed in the lyrics of this song, people pray night after night longing and hoping for a response, although no signs could show a promising future on its way. For me this is like what is conveyed by traditional Chinese poets. They also have a perpetual longing for something unpredictable, and then turn these melancholic thoughts into poems, by comparing themselves to flowers and beautiful women, with a hope that the poems may ring a bell and arouse imaginations in future audience's heart. In the lyrics of this song, hope is compared to a bird which flies away so swiftly, and people's hearts could be compared to a song, which we barely understand. In traditional Chinese

poetry, people also like singing and singing out their poems. The rhyme of their poems matches perfectly well with the melody of a song. There is always a beautiful rhythmic melody both within Chinese and western poetic traditions, which helps poets and artists immensely, to change something ungraspable into a musicality when language fails to function.

Ancient Chinese poets like the metaphorical meaning of peach blossoms very much, which they think can convey the beauty and elegance of a girl about to wed, as the sixth poem in *Book of Poetry* (ca. 1000-600 B. C. E.) suggests. Stephen Owen translated the title of this poem literally into 'Peach Tree Soft and Tender' (Owen, 1996, p. 34), while Xu Yuanchong translated it as 'The newly-wed' (Yan, 2020, p. 8) to make the subtle meaning clearer. Both efforts are very precious and meaningful, and both make great contributions to the further traveling of the poem. To understand a certain culture, we need to know and understand its metaphors. And to depict another culture, it is also very crucial that the translator should *use* metaphors from both traditions well, so that target readers can very quickly gain both something homely and something foreign, which to some extent compensates for the loss in the translation process. And in this sense, a good translator should also be a good writer.

Translation as Mirroring

With the above-said thoughts in my mind, I now regard translation as a mirroring with translators' creative rebellion. In *The Story of the Stone*, chapter twelve is about 'a mirror for the romantic' (*feng yue bao jian*风月宝鉴), which literally means a mirror for the wind and the moon. And Cao Xueqin, the author of this novel, also once thought about using 'a mirror for the romantic' as the title for the whole book, from which we can see that 'mirror' and 'mirroring' play a very important part in literary imaginations. But I would like to put it further. From my perspective, 'mirror' is not only a metaphor depicted in Chinese and western literary thoughts, but should be the true essence and methodology of translation as well. 'Mirror' as a metaphor helps us see translation and other cultural phenomena both more subjectively and objectively, with all the imperfections, ruptures and possibilities.

In Stephen Owen's book, *Remembrances: The Experience of the Past in Classical Literature*, he depicts the relationship between remembering and what is remembered in the following way:

> The imitation is perpetually imperfect and unfulfilled; if it achieved perfection, it would no longer be itself, becoming instead the thing imitated. A similar gap occurs between remembering and what is remembered, but a gap of time, loss, and incompleteness intervenes. Memory too is always secondary, posterior. The force of literature lives in that gap, that veiling, which simultaneously promises and denies access.(Owen, 1986, p. 2)

Stephen Owen aims at illustrating that the present could never be a faithful reproduction of the past. Past experiences as a *mimesis* are 'secondary', 'posterior', and will always be 'imperfect' and 'unfulfilled'. History itself is with a fictional element. When we attempt to trace back to a historical period, which can always be said to be relevant to our own, but we never truly know how much it is relevant, we are always being subjective. From my perspective, what Stephen Owen says can also help explain the nature and charm of translation. The nature of translation is, although it is a traveling concept and can at least cross borders physically, it will always be 'secondary', 'posterior', 'imperfect' and 'unfulfilled'. But the charm of translation is, it lives in and thrives on that language gap, that imperfect mirroring, that unfaithful imitation, that veiling, that always-be-unapproachable. The nature and charm of translation could also be that of language itself,

as a way of living, interpretation and survival. As George Steiner puts it, he dedicates his book, *After Babel*, to "all those who love language, who experience language as formative of their humanity. Above all, it addresses itself, in hope of response, to poets. Which is to say to anyone who makes the language live and who knows that the affair at Babel was both a disaster and – this being the etymology of the word 'disaster' – a rain of stars upon man." (Steiner, 1998, p. xviii) Translation studies and aspects of language and untranslatability could not only be a reality we face, but also a metaphor we create.

Poetry and literary traditions are untranslatable to some extent, because language and literature themselves are exemplifications of an author's own mental maps which could not be fully translated. But poetry and literary traditions are also translatable to some extent due to translators' sharp observations and exuberant imaginations. Besides, I believe there is always something people from all parts of the world share in common with each other, which could either be artistic talents or poetic imaginations. Understanding poetic traditions and aesthetics in both the West and the East helps me show more respect to translators and their contributions. And understanding translation as a deliberate misuse, appropriation or rebellion makes me demystify as well as living with the mystique in different poetic traditions better. Red Pine says in the introduction to his translation version of *Daodejing*[3] that Laozi[4] 'redirects our vision to this ancient mirror' (Pine, 1996).He refers to how Laozi makes use of the image of the moon as an ancient mirror. How wonderful when poetics, imageries, philosophical thoughts and translations all serve as a certain kind of mirroring could be! In Renaissance period, people usually do not see themselves in the mirror, but others. As Debora Shuger tells us, "the majority of Renaissance mirrors – or rather, mirror metaphors – do reflect a face, but not the face of the person in front of the mirror. Typically, the person looking in the mirror sees an exemplary image, either positive or negative." (Shuger, 1999, p. 22) Since Renaissance humanism is so essential to translation studies and comparative literature as a discipline, we may also want to borrow the metaphorical meanings of mirrors in the period to better reflect on the modern era – how the recognition of others contributes to the cognition of ourselves.

When William E. Cain further reflects upon Shakespeare, theatre and audience, he says, 'It is out separateness from the characters, the disjunction between them and us, the not seeing and not knowing of their thinking, that paradoxically connects us to them across an impassable distance. We connect through separation' (Cain, 2017, p. 54). He values more about Shakespeare's absences and gaps rather than presences and the attempt to fill in the gap. But I would like to misuse it a bit and apply it to translation studies. I advocate both an absent presence and a present absence. For me, an author's real intention is like an absent presence – the author being absent physically while present imaginarily and psychologically. The author has left traces within literary texts, which shape readers and translators' imaginations and psychology. And translators' effort is like a present absence – the translator being always present because he or she must contribute certain subjectivity for practical purposes, while still trying hard to 'touch the real' as coined by Stephen Greenblatt, by being metaphorically and psychologically absent as if they wore an invisible cloak. Both the gaps between original literary texts and translations, and the attempts to fill in the gap are beneficial in my eyes. William E. Cain coins a phrase, 'we connect through separation', and I would like to coin another. We connect and separate, and then connect again. We connect to show different cultures and value systems can commingle at certain point; we then separate because every culture still has its own unique characteristics which could never be fully translated and had better remain unsaid; we connect again because all those unspeakable things are in fact the real charm and strength of cross-cultural understanding, which will help eventually explain better both the concept and practice of *Weltliteratur* (World Literature).

A distinguished scholar in comparative literature, Zhang Longxi, once wrote an essay based on textual evidence, which draws a connection between how mirrors are depicted in both Chinese and western literary traditions. I would like to take his concluding remarks also as my own:

> What a comparative and cross-cultural horizon allows us to see is the wonderful confluence of human imagination beyond the differences of language, culture, and literary convention, while always retaining the specificities of each of the world's languages and literatures in our deep appreciation. Every literary creation is particular and unique in its own way, but isn't it always a great joy to detect and appreciate the inner connections of the human mind and human imagination beyond the endless varieties of literary creation? (Zhang, 2019, p. 612)

Through translation, its loss, gains through the loss, and elements that are untranslatable, we get to hear and appreciate sounds and poetics from another literary tradition, and then most delightedly find something both different from and similar to our own. And when we begin to realize every reading or writing experience is already a translation, we have also been translated, and then most cheerfully choose to engage ourselves more into the vastness of cultural and poetical heritage shared by humankind.

I mostly agree with James O. Young when he concludes his book, *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts* by proposing that,

> In a world where cultures are still in conflict, arguably the world needs more content appropriation, not less. Artists who appropriate from other cultures, and the audiences of these artists, often come to have a greater appreciation of the value of other ways of living. (Young, 2008, p.157)

He also argues elsewhere in the book that 'cultural appropriation endangers a culture, not when others borrow from it, but when its members borrow too extensively from others' (Young, 2008, p.153). When outsiders borrow certain elements from insiders, a mirroring happens. It promotes harmony among different aesthetics and value judgements, enlightens more literary imaginations and poetic talents, while still preserving the uniqueness and subjectivity of each culture well. I propose that we should see translation as such a mirroring, and it functions in the following ways: we understand that there could be reflections of our literary masterpieces; we see others reflected in our cultural contexts; we see ourselves reflected in other cultural backgrounds. These reflections help us understand both ourselves and others, not through imitation, but imagination and communication, with sincerity and creativity, in a wise way.

Some Further Thoughts and Questions

Shakespeare has become a cultural code for Chinese audiences. And there have already been many researches about translating and adapting Shakespeare's plays into Chinese contexts. As a Chinese, I always wish to know, why Chinese tend to have an excessive reverence for Shakespeare even though the Elizabethan and Jacobean age in and for which Shakespeare wrote his plays are so different from our own. What do we really get, or learn from Shakespeare?

When I was a child, the first Shakespeare's play I knew was *Romeo and Juliet*. But for me and perhaps for many other Chinese audiences, this play is more of a romance rather than a tragedy. I was so impressed by young Romeo and Juliet's passionate and energetic love that I never thought about how Juliet's age could influence our interpretations of this play, the significance of the balcony scene within the entire narrative, and the importance of the fact that Juliet is not Romeo's first lover, whether there could be another ending if the Friar's letter is not held up by the quarantine measures, the

importance of the prologue and how the 1996 film version brilliantly makes use of and dramatizes the prologue, and linguistic interpretations of the play including Juliet's contemplations of 'name': 'Wherefore art thou Romeo?'

In a recent conference about Shakespeare and music, a Chinese scholar mentioned a famous Chinese pop song entitled *Liang Shanbo and Juliet (*梁山伯与茱丽叶*)*. The tragic love of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai is among Chinese ancient classic folklores. One version of their tragic story goes like this: Zhu Yingtai dresses herself as a boy in order to go to classes, where she meets Liang Shanbo and falls in love with him. Liang Shanbo's love for Zhu Yingtai awakens the moment when he knows she is a girl. However, due to family relations and many other reasons, they could not be a happy pair. Liang dies first, and Zhu follows him and accepts the sweet doom of death in order to mourn for their love. They later turn into butterflies dancing around every part of the world. And when the story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai encounters *Romeo and Juliet*, we may feel blissful that Chinese and western cultures can commingle. However, I notice some unsettling elements in the lyrics of the song. I have found out that the lyrics seem to discuss love *in general* and fail to recognize the particularity of both stories. For instance, the repetitive sentences in the lyrics are "I love you, you are my Romeo. I want to become your Zhu Yingtai," and "I love you, you are my Juliet. I want to become your Liang Shanbo." This may be already too far from what original stories try to convey: Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai's strong determinations and beautiful stubbornness, Juliet's poetic and innocent imaginations and Romeo's young and naïve bravery. What is even more unsettling is: are these two tragic stories really comparable? In fact, they may share no similarities apart from merely two facts: a love story and a tragic story. We may say musical adaptations can reflect a composer's personal landscape, which could at once be a borrowing and a creative rebellion. But if what we borrow from *Romeo and Juliet* or *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai* is nothing but love in general, does it show more of a reverence and fondness for original texts, or an ignorance and misuse of them? Another question is: is it really ethical, or proper to use pop songs to re-enter or re-interpret Shakespeare's texts? When the form shows an unbearable lightness, how could we carry the weight of the tragedy and profundity of Shakespeare?

I also attended another Shakespeare conference recently, during which a brilliant scholar, Duncan Lees, discussed Chinese audience's reception of Shakespeare. He is still working on the inter-cultural education and what Chinese readers really get from Shakespeare when they have little knowledge of, or maybe do not wish to explore further Shakespeare's contexts. His speech was quite thought-provoking, and at that time I was firmly holding on to the assumption that Shakespeare could be translated and every new translation or adaptation in fact helped Shakespeare have a new life. But now I realize that the real problematic thing is in fact not translations themselves, but interpretations based on translation versions, in other words, interpretations of interpretations. I hope to explore the theme of translation a bit further, not to legitimatize every translation in a well-established framework of world literature, not only to discuss the loss and gain in translations and adaptations, but also how to *express* the linguistic and cultural differences for the ultimate purpose of promoting cross-cultural understanding.

A great Chinese scholar, Liu Hao, gives a fruitful and exuberant analysis of Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu's contributions to world drama in her paper entitled 'Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu: Their Significance to the Formation of World Drama.' She argues most beautifully that 'to start the new lives of Tang Xianzu and Shakespeare in the "world," we may need to embrace the loss of some 'original' flavours as well as the gain of new productivity in their circulation, and remind ourselves of the coexistence of the diverse standards for works that are both part of a national canon and a source for creativity

across space and time.' (Liu, 2019, p. 21) I do agree with her thoughts, but also want to step a little bit further. For me, the realization of the coexistence could at once be charming and dangerous: charming in a way that we learn to respect people from other cultural traditions holding completely different assumptions, dangerous in a way that this very acknowledgement of the 'coexistence' could be another Babel Tower set for human kind, only in a friendlier way.

A Tentative Conclusion

Maybe, even though the loss and gain in translations and adaptations are inevitable and may show creativity and diversity, we still need to know what and why we have lost or gained in translations, show more respect to the original texts, which I believe could depict a new landscape for world literature. Maybe, we owe a lot to different translation versions, and we will never have the concept of untranslatability without knowing all these translation versions at the very beginning. In other words, we can never identify the problem without creating it. And maybe, a comparative reading of different translation versions will help us deal better with untranslatability, because comparison is also a mirroring, and a philosophy, with absences and presences.

And I also endorse Emily Apter's endeavour to 'relate linguistic pluralism (inherent in translation as a liberal art) to a practice of *Weltliteratur* that takes full measures of linguistic constraints and truth conditions in the investigation of singular modes of existing in the world's languages.' (Apter, 2013, p. 27) Difficult but worthwhile, I hope literary scholars devoted to philosophy of language, poets or common readers, could value a part of life without losing the whole picture, and also shine some distinctive lights when being among stars.

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Notes

[1] The full text of the keynote address at the 7th edition of the Jaipur BookMark Festival delivered by Berthold Franke.
[2] Translation mine.
[3] Also, *Taoteching*.
[4] Also, Lao-tzu.
[5] See the second page of *Introduction* of this book.

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Dasein in Translation: Untranslatable as Equivalence?

SABINA FOLNOVIĆ JAITNER

Abstract: The majority of scientific research dedicated to the translation of Martin Heidegger´s thinking analyses English translations and other major world languages. However, there is a paucity of rigorous research focused on translating Heidegger´s philosophy into Slavic languages, especially in the context of Bosnian/Croatian/ Montenegrin/Serbian (BCMS). This lack of scholarship is striking, especially when one takes into account the influence of Heidegger´s thinking on the Slavic philosophical tradition. The paper explores a perspective on the translation of a term that is often referred to as "untranslatable:" *Dasein.* By analysing how *Dasein* is translated into Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian, this paper will investigate the specific linguistic and cultural conditions that make something inherently translatable or untranslatable.

Unlike in English translations, in which the word is printed in German, *Dasein* is actually translated into BCMS. By analysing how translators decided to transform this abstract term into BCMS, this paper will challenge the concept of "untranslatability" in relation to the concept of "equivalence." In doing so, the concept of "untranslatability" becomes an alternative to the monolingualism of world literature.

Keywords: Untranslatability, equivalence, Dasein, philosophy, world literature

Introduction

If we consider the fact that translation of philosophy plays a crucial part in world literature, then it is necessary to understand how philosophical texts fluctuate within an international literary network. In order to do so, we must first ask ourselves: do philosophical texts fluctuate the same way as texts in other literary genres? In his book *How to Read World Literature* (2009), David Damrosh states one obvious fact; most literature circulates around the world precisely due to translation. However, world literature is often criticized for showing little interest in translation studies as a field of research (Bassnet 2019: 1). The feeling appears to be mutual; Susan Bassnet argues that one of the reasons why translation has a weak reputation in literary studies is due to translation studies' own critical attitude towards the "monolingualization of literary history" (Bassnet 2019: 4).

When it comes to the strangeness of philosophical language or the difficulties of translating philosophy, Martin Heidegger's use of language is often taken as an emblematic example. Especially in regards to his use of specific terminology, Heidegger's writing tends to be labeled as "untranslatable." One such work, devoted exclusively to the analysis of the translations of Heidegger´s *Sein und Zeit,* is the *Romanian journal of Phenomenology*: „*Studiae Phaenomonologica: Translating Heidegger´s Sein und Zeit*" (2005). The editor of the publication, Christian Ciocan, points out that only a few philosophical works achieved international fame in such a short time as *Sein und Zeit,* a feat that is partially due to its rate of translation. Even more, most scholars find Heidegger one of the few writers whose texts actually become clearer through translation. Thus, Heidegger's translators played an extremely valuable role in both the scholarship and dissemination

of Heidegger's philosophy (Ciocan 2005: 9). The publication itself presents the work of translators and editors of Heidegger´s work, describing how they faced the formidable challenges of trying to introduce his lexicon into an entirely different language. However, the publication does not include the experiences of Bosnian/Croatian/ Montenegrin/Serbian translators.[1] In addition to the aforementioned publication, devoted exclusively to *Sein und Zeit* translations, numerous papers have been published on Heidegger's translations in general. Those of more recent date include: *Translating Heidegger* (Groth 2004) and *Heidegger, Translation, and the Task of Thinking* (Schalow ed. 2011). In his book, Miles Groth analyses how early translations of Heidegger's thought influenced various interpretations of his philosophy, which was extremely helpful in making Heidegger's thoughts more digestible to the reading public in mostly American academia. In *Heidegger, Translation, and the Task of Thinking*, Frank Schalow collected essays dedicated to the translator Parvis Emad, whose translations greatly contributed to a better understanding of Heidegger's philosophy in the United States (Schalow 2011: vii). Schalow, much like Ciocan (2005), emphasizes the importance of translation in philosophy, announcing a new period in Heidegger´s research in which more significance would be placed on the role of translation:

> Now the question of translation, which had been considered only peripherally, had to be addressed seriously. Suddenly, the concern for translation as a task vaults into the forefront of the study of Heidegger's thinking, in a way which had never occurred before. A new era in the study of Heidegger's philosophy is born (Schalow 2011: viii).

Another valuable work dedicated to the translation of Heidegger, especially dedicated to the translation of his terminology into English, is *Die Übersetzbarkeit philosophischer Diskurse. Eine Übersetzungskritik an den beiden englischen Übersetzungen von Heideggers Sein und Zeit* (Wenzel 2015). Xenia Wenzel, in this remarkable translational analysis of English translations of *Sein und Zeit,* provides an interdisciplinary approach to the topic by bringing philosophy, linguistics, and literature into dialogue with one another.

However, it is striking that the majority of scientific research, dedicated to the translation of Heidegger´s thinking, only analyses English translations. Moreover, very little is known about translating Heidegger´s philosophy into Slavic languages, especially into Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian (BCMS). This vacuum of research is even more jarring when one considers the importance of Heidegger´s thinking within the Slavic philosophical tradition.

So far, *Sein und Zeit* has been translated into 25 languages. In terms of Slavic language translations, the only translations published are in Bulgarian, Czech, Polish, Russian, BCMS, and Slovenian (Ciocan 2005: 11). By examining the specific solutions that the BCMS translators took when confronted with Heidegger´s *Dasein*, this paper aims to examine how concepts, such as „equivalence" and „untranslatable," can offer alternative linguistic methods to the field of world literature, without falling prey to the monolingualism for which it is often criticized.

One of the specific qualities of philosophical texts is that the demarcation between different languages is not clearly defined. In this type of text, different foreign languages are intertwined. This specific approach to language allows us to reconsider the concept of "equivalence" within translation. That is, in the context of the language of philosophy (not to be confused with the philosophy of language!), the question arises: what do the concepts of „untranslatable" and „equivalence" actually mean? In this study, this question will be explored through the concrete example of the BCMS translation of Heidegger's term *Dasein* and, moreover, how the concepts of „equivalence" and „untranslatables" have been approached within the specific linguistic context of BCMS.

Equivalence as a Construct

According to Gadamer, in the case of interlingual translation, it is the translator who enables communication. Therefore, every translation is also simultaneously an interpretation, because the meaning that the translator must preserve in the translation depends on how the translator interprets the text. However, a philosophical text, whether original or translated, always already consists of foreign terms or ideas, translated not only words from foreign languages but also concepts from different epochs. According to Ree, the language of philosophy is already a translation in which many languages resound (Cf. Ree 2001). Thus, in exploring the origin of certain philosophical terms, we are actually exploring the history of translation itself. Moreover, philosophical texts often cross national language boundaries. A common example are Greek concepts or phrases that remain untranslated to further contextualize an argument or theory that the philosopher is positing. Here, the task of philosophy translators becomes further complicated, as they must also decide the terms or phrases that can adequately straddle disparate linguistic fields. After all, translation is supposed to separate languages, or, in Naoki Sakai's words, translation becomes "an act of drawing a border, of bordering" (Sakai 2009: 74). In this sense, translation is an act that draws boundaries between languages. The question arises: how do we translate a multilingual philosophical text, without reducing it to a monolingual one through translation?

In this case, it is interesting to consider the questions posed by Sakai: "How do we allow ourselves to tell one language from the other? What allows us to represent language as a unity?" (Sakai 2009: 73). In answering this question, Sakai compares language to Kant's "regulative idea:" what is known as the "Copernican turn" in philosophy. By examining the conditions of human cognition, Kant reversed the traditional subject-object relation, placing the subject in a central position. Trying to discern how cognition of external objects is possible, Kant came to the conclusion that the object's independence from the subject is only an illusion. That is, the external object is not something wholly external to the subject, as our cognition of objects depends on our subjectivity. Therefore, the object is a construct of subjective cognition. Sakai uses Kant´s doctrine to show how the unity of the national language is also only a construct:

> It is not possible to know whether a particular language as a unity exists or not. It is the other way around: by subscribing to the idea of the unity of language, it becomes possible for us to systematically organize knowledge about languages in a modern, scientific manner (Sakai 2009: 73).

What Sakai actually claims, with the help of Kant's doctrine, is that, if the cognition of external objects is only a construct of the subject's cognition, then the unity of a particular language must also only be a construct. With this subjective (in Kant's sense) approach, Sakai provides a new perspective on national languages. According to him, the unity of the national language is a "schema for nationality" (Sakai 2009: 73), which has the function of "national integration" (Sakai 2009: 73). The supposed unity of a national language, viewed as a regulative idea, further manifests itself as a complex construct of ethnic identity. Considering the nation and national languages as subjective constructs, Sakai approaches the question of translation with these ideas in mind. In this context, translation functions as a way of demarcating national languages, that is: „… the representation of translation (…) serves as a schema of co-figuration: only when translation is represented by the schematism of co-figuration does the putative unity of a national language as a regulative idea ensue" (Sakai 2009: 75). In this sense, Sakai speaks of translation in the sense of a border: "The unity of a national or ethnic language as a scheme is already accompanied by another scheme for the unity of a different language" (Sakai 2009: 75).

Sakai's perspective on language and translation allows us to look at the problem outside the binary relationship between translatability and "untranslatability." The concept of "equivalence" has always been considered as an unattainable, unrealistic goal of translation, the quality of is too often analysed in a dichotomous relationship, as represented in Derrida's translatability-untranslatability or Ricoeur's faithfulness-betrayal (Leal: 237). However, how do such dichotomous definitions help us in practical translation or in translation analysis? Alice Leal, as a way of forging a way out of such a binary opposition, suggests that we look at "equivalence" as a "construct made possible by translation rather than as a prerequisite for translation to take place or as an all-embracing measure to asses translation quality" (Leal: 239). Sakai's and Leal's positions lead to the question: who determines that something is "untranslatable?" In other words, who declares that a certain term is untranslatable and from which position? If we look at the tradition of translation in Slavic languages, a different approach and attitude to translation is revealed, one that differs from those found in Germanic languages. Thereby, Slavic translations also reveal a uniquely different attitude towards the concept of "untranslatability."

Translation in Slavic Languages

In Slavic languages, there is a tradition of trying to find an equivalent for each term in the target language of the translation. For example, unlike in English-language editions in which Heidegger's *Dasein* is simply kept as *Dasein*, BCMS translators utilize several translational solutions for this term, as shown later in the text. Philosopher and Slavist, Anto Knežević, provides an explanation for this different strategy. Slavic translators from IX. century translated philosophical texts directly from the Greek language, without the mediation of Latin (Knežević 1991: 70) as was done by German, Italian, Spanish and French philosophical traditions. Moreover, "Slavic religious teachers, knowing the Greek language well, tried to transfer all the ambiguity of abstract Greek words and names into the Slavic language that they also knew" (Knežević 1988: 26).

In such a tradition of translation, where supposed untranslatable words are translated, untranslatables are often seen as something that reflects negatively on the target language. For example, the philosopher Damir Barbarić believes that foreign words are "the product of complete submission when in contact with another, historically stronger and superior language" (Barbarić 1992: 179):

> The overpowered language takes over the finished words-concepts of the other, but remains essentially indifferent to them and untouched by them, and it draws its own into the more hidden interior and preserves it at the cost of deeper repression into the unarticulated indeterminacy of some fluid prelude. Along with that then comes the closedness and essential blindness to the real power and full meaningful reach of the taken word, its world-opening power remains unknown and, in fact, silent. Likewise, on the other hand, the foreign word itself remains within the conquered language-speech in a kind of victorious isolation; it does not enter into a living relationship with other words and does not participate in that living all-conveying meaning, which we previously met as a universal metaphor of natural speech. Thus, a foreign word remains in a way a dead body in the living tissue of language-speech […] (Barbarić 1992: 179-180).[2]

What does it actually mean to compare an untranslatable word to a dead body? It could be said that Barbarić introduces another dichotomous relationship: a translated word is seen as part of a living body, while an untranslatable word represents a dead organ in a living organism. According to Barbarić, only a translated word enables the transfer of meaning and significance, something that can only occur from the free encounter of two languages (Barbarić 1992: 181), and not from a situation in which a larger language conquers a smaller, weaker one, as is the case with keeping source-language words in

translation. According to him, the translated term in the language of translation not only "opens a new field of meaning" but new possibilities for philosophizing as well (Barbarić 1992: 180-181).

However, why should the untranslated word in translation have to be seen as the by-product of a great language enslaving a smaller, weaker one? If we look at English example, the precedent for translating the already mentioned term, *Dasein*, calls into question this statement made by Barbarić, because it is hard to imagine the English language as small or weak. Furthermore, according to Barbarić, the conquest of a smaller, weaker language by a larger one would then result in the death of the weaker language. If an untranslated word functions as a dead body in the living organism of language, then that dead body will infect the living tissue around it, leading to the death of that living tissue – if we are to follow Barbarić's metaphor to its logical end. Such a binary position seems to presuppose a clear distinction between the original language of philosophy and the language of philosophy in translation. However, if we return to both the assumption that it is difficult to distinguish all the languages that resonate within philosophical texts and the position of language as a construct of the subject (Sakai), then such a binary position is questionable. For a philosophical text is not monolingual, and the same should hold true for the translation of philosophy. If, to borrow Barbarić's terminology, the language of philosophy in translation represents living tissue, while both languages resonate in both the original language and the translation (cf. Ree), then the boundary between the original and the translation is not easy to determine. Barbarić argues for a discernible dichotomy between the living tissue of the translated language of philosophy and the untranslated word as a dead body. However, this "living tissue" of the translated language of philosophy is also already a translation. Thus, this "living tissue" is by no means homogeneous, and the non-translated word is a crucial part of maintaining that heterogeneous and multilingual whole. As an element that is constantly in the process of translation, untranslatable words are an open concept that the reader of a philosophical text is able to identify as such, and, therefore, work to understand.

According to Barbara Cassin, untranslatable terms are not words that have stopped being translated. Rather, they are words that are constantly undergoing the flux of the translation process (Cf. Cassin 2016: 243). According to Rada Iveković, untranslatable words represent "the guarantee of the polysemic values" (Iveković 2007). She argues that "untranslatables do not prevent translation: they are, on the contrary, its fuel, and we are lucky to have them. We translate thanks to, and in spite of, the untranslatables. Therefore, we have the context" (Iveković 2007). Therefore, we are provided with an understanding of the "untranslatable" as something that is dead and finite. On the other hand, we have the opposite attitude about the "untranslatable" as a living and open category of language. According to Iveković, untranslatable words are not isolated in the text. Rather, they provide significant context for the greater understanding of the text as a whole. In this way, untranslatable words can still play a crucial role in the translator's task of creating a kind of "equivalence" between source and target languages.

Dasein in *The Dictionary of Untranslatables* and in the BCMS Translations

If much can be learned about the history of philosophy through the history of translating philosophical thought, then the small example of how *Dasein* is translated, as discussed in *The Dictionary of Untranslatables,* shows how the history of translation is not linear. However, there are various traditions of translation that approach the issue of "untranslatables" differently. *Dasein* is probably one of the most famous terms carrying the status of "untranslatable." *The Dictionary of Untranslatables* lists the meanings of this philosophical term in English, French, Italian, and Latin.

> *Dasein´s* resistance to any translation emerged in the twentieth century as an outcome of the Germanization of the Latin *existentia* into *Dasein*, as if *Dasein* had ultimately never recovered from this blow and continued to point toward an entirely different area of meaning from the one to which the metaphysical term *existentia* tried to assign it (Cassin 2014: 195).

 However, *The Dictionary* does not provide any example of how this term is translated into Slavic languages. We can argue whether it is better to translate this term or keep it in the original, but it is undeniable that various BCMS translations of this term, as well as translations of Heidegger's works in general, opened new perspectives in the research of Heidegger's philosophy. BCMS' translational approach – translating philosophical terms rather than leaving them in the original (as is the case with *Dasein* in English translations) – sheds new light on the concept of "the untranslatable." What distinguishes Slavic philosophical terminology from German philosophical terminology is that the transfer of terms from Greek did not take place through Latin, due to the translation work of St. Cyril and Methodius (Knezevic 1989 and 1991; Komel 2005). Although, it should be emphasized that *The Dictionary of Untranslatables* is primarily a dictionary of Western terms. Thus, the concern arises on the status of Slavic languages within the Western treasury of knowledge if, as the example of *Dasein* shows, they are excluded from the discussion. Let us now examine how this term is translated into the BCMS language.[4]

  According to the *German, Croatian* or *Serbian Dictionary*, the German verb *dasein* means "to be present" or "to be there" (Hurm 1974: 129). However, *The Dictionary* lists the corresponding noun, *das Dasein*, as bivovanje, bitak, život, opstanak ("being," "existing," "life," "existence") (Hurm 1974: 129). As a philosophical concept, *Dasein* first appears in the German language in Kant's translation of the Latin *existentia* in the text *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes* (*The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God)*. Kant's term was later adopted by Hegel (Cassin 2014: 195), who distinguished *Dasein* from *Existenz*. However, it was Heidegger who made a clear difference between the two concepts in his attempt to transcend classic, Western metaphysical thought:

> "Das ʽWesenʼ des <u>Daseins</u> liegt in seiner Existenz" (*SZ:* 42).
> "Bit <u>tubitka</u> leži u njegovoj egzistenciji" (Šarinić: 46). ["The <u>core</u> of there-being is in its existence."]
> "Suština" <u>tubitka</u> leži u njegovoj egzistenciji" (Todorović: 69). ["The <u>essence</u> of there-being is in its existence."]

Existenz is, therefore, the essence of *Dasein* (tubitak), but by no means is it an equivalent of *Dasein* (tubitak). Hence, German philosophy, from Kant through Fichte and Jacobi to Hegel, already distinguished between the two concepts (Heidegger 1985: xxvi). In his later text *Der Satz vom Grund* (*The Principle of Reason*), Heidegger would claim that *Dasein* is a translation of Latin's *praesentia*: *"Auch die uns geläufigen Worte wie "Absicht" für intentio, "Ausdruck für expressio, "Gegenstand" für obiectum, "Dasein" für praesentia werden erst im 18. Jahrhundert gebildet"* (Heidegger 1978: 32).

  In both BCMS translations of *Sein und Zeit*,[3] *Dasein* is translated as tubitak. The first translation into BCMS (1985) includes an "Introduction," written by philosopher Gajo Petrović, who uses the term tubivstvovanje instead of tubitak. His decision, which contradicts the decision made by translator Šarinić, is based around the argument that tubitak lacks a sense of temporality. Hence, Petrović used the term tubivstvovanje, which is an imperfect verb that emphasizes both the spatial and temporal dimensions contained in Heidegger´s *Dasein* (Cf. Folnović Jaitner 2016). Furthermore, when Petrović refers to a sentence from *Sein und Zeit* in his introduction, he quotes neither the German original nor Šarinić's translation. Instead, he provides his own translation for the sentence in question. For example, Petrović in his "Introduction" to Šarinić's translation quotes from Heidegger:[5]

> **Prosječna** svakodnevnost tubivstvovanja **može se prema tome odrediti kao** propadajući-razotkriveno [*verfallend-erschlossene*], bačeno-nabacujuće [projicirajuće, *geworfenentwer-fende*] bivstvovanje-u-svijetu, kojem se u njegovom bivstvovanju pri „svijetu" i u su-bivstvovanju s drugima radi o samom najvlastitijem moći-biti [o samoj najvlastitijoj moći bivstvovanja, *um das eigenste Seinkönnen selbst*] (Heidegger 1985: CXX).
> ["The average *everydayness of Dasein* can therefore be determined as decaying-exposed [*verfallend-erschlossene*], thrown-throwing [projecting, geworfen-entwerfende] being-in-the-world, to whom its being by "the world" and in with-being with others are the most proper form of could-be [the most proper form itself of being, *um das eigenste Seinkönnen selbst*"]].

The same sentence in Šarinić's translation goes as follows:

> Prosječna svakidašnjost tubitka može, prema tome, biti određena kao propadajući-dokučeni, bačeno-projicirajući bitak-u-svijetu, kojemu se u njegovu bitku kod „svijeta" i u su-bitku s Drugima radi o samom najvlastitijemu Moći-biti (Heidegger 1985: 206).
> ["The average everydayness of *Dasein*, therefore, be determined as decaying-fathomed, thrown-projecting being-in-the-world, to whom its being by "the world" and in with-being with Others is the most proper form of Could-be."]

Unfortunately, neither Petrović nor Šarinić question this translational disparity. Petrović gives the following explanation for his translation of *Dasein* as tubivstvovanje ("there-being" verbal noun):

> The component *Da*, which we have here translated as tu (there), suggests much more than that. German *da* does not only refer to the spatial tu but also to tada (then), among other things. Hence, it indicates a temporal aspect of interpreting man's existence and existence in general (Heidegger 1985: xxv-xxvi, my translation).[6]

As early as 1965, Petrović, in his work titled: Filozofija i marksizam (*Philosophy and Marxism*), explained why he considered the suffix -*ak* to be not the right choice for the imperfective aspect of verbs (Petrović 1965: 331). Translating *Dasein* as tubivstvovanje, in Petrović's view, allows one to grasp not only the word's spatial dimension but its temporal inferences as well. A similar opinion is also held by the Bulgarian translator of *Sein und Zeit,* Dimiter Georgiev Saschew, who believes that the word *Dasein* should be read as a verb, not as a noun, precisely because the concept encompasses both space and time (Saschew 2005: 39). However, translating *Dasein* as a verb in the infinitive form or a noun causes a paradoxical situation:

> ... the more someone strives again and again to determine *Dasein* as a noun and substance, the more the temporality of the tempora; word *Sein* comes to the fore and indicates the impossibility of finding *Sein* as a substance and the meaning of *Sein* as a content. (Sa Calvacante Schuback 2005: 211) (my translation).[7]

In addition, Todorović translates *Dasein* as tubitak, except in those cases where Heidegger uses the term in the Kantian or Hegelian sense. In such cases, he translates it as postojanje ("existence," "subsistence"). In the collection of essays and translations of some paragraphs of *Sein und Zeit* (Barbarić 2013), *Dasein* is also translated as tubitak. In any case, regardless of whether translators choose to translate this concept or leave it untranslated, hardly any translation solution can satisfy the translators or, for that matter, their readers: "*Keine Übersetzung des Wortes Dasein kann das Übersetzen unseres ganzen Wesens in den Bereich einer gewandelten Wahrheit zustandebringen, weil Dasein gerade diese Übersetzung bedeutet*" (Sá Cavalcante Schuback 2005: 213).

Both translations distinguish Heidegger's use of the concept of *Dasein* in the Hegelian sense, whereby Šarinić translates it as opstojanje ("survival:) and Todorović as postojanje ("subsistence"), with the addition of the original term in square brackets: postojanje [*Dasein*]:

Example:
»*Ich ist der reine Begriff selbst, der als Begriff zum* <u>*Dasein*</u> *gekommen ist*«. 433
»**Ja je sam čisti pojam, koji je kao pojam došao do** <u>**opstojanja**</u>«. (Š: 493) ["I is the pure concept itself, which as concept has reached <u>survival</u>."]
„**Ja je sam čisti pojam, koji je kao pojam došao do** <u>postojanja</u> [Dasein]". (T: 495) ["I is the pure concept itself, which as concept has reached <u>subsistence</u>."]

In BCMS, Dasein is also translated as egzistencija (existence) **i** život (life). These solutions were made by translator Dunja Melčić in her translation of Heidegger´s *Rectoral Address*. She explained her decision as follows:

> The original verbal meaning of the noun '*Dasein*' is *da sein*; for example, "*ich bin da*", which can be translated as "here I am" or "I am here" in an ordinary linguistic context. No matter how many different interpretations of Heidegger's philosophy and his terms exist, it is undeniable that this original verbal meaning, the meaning of everyday speech, is crucial for his thought. However, in the Croatian language, in contrast to English and French, we can substantiate this "I am here", but tubitak is, of course, to some extent, an invented word that is difficult to accept… (Melčić in Heidegger 1999: 44) (my translation)[8]

By translating *Dasein* as egzistencija (existence) or život (life), Melčić probably wanted to avoid a neologism, such as tubitak, while still following Heidegger's preference for bestowing colloquial words with new philosophical meanings. However, translating *Dasein* as egzistencija creates confusion, because Heidegger also uses this term *Existenz*. Thus, it is not always clear whether, in translation, *existence* is necessarily Heidegger's *existence* or his *Dasein*.

Yet, another of Heidegger´s term is translated as egzistencija (existence) in the BCMS language: *Daßsein*. The BCMS translator of the first translation of the *Sein und Zeit*, Hrvoje Šarinić, translated *Daßsein* as egzistencija (existence). However, in *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger uses the term *Existenz*, which Šarinić also translated as egzistencija. Such a translational decision by Šarinić alludes to the fact that, within translation, there is no difference between Heidegger's terms *Daßsein* and *Existenz*, as he uses both in *Sein und Zeit*. Leaving the term *Daßsein* in the text of the translation as untranslated may contradict the Slavic tradition of translation, but it may guarantee a better understanding of Heidegger's terminology. In other words, the untranslated term would show the difference between Heidegger's terms: *Dasein*, *Daßsein* and *Existenz*.

Conclusion

The example of *Dasein*'s BCMS translation shows that, in some cases, an untranslatable word guarantees a better understanding than through the translation of the term itself, and, therefore, it should not be seen as intruder but more as a foreign word that gives readers a different perspective. Moreover, an untranslatable word can take the role of "equivalence" (Cf. Folnović Jaitner 2020). Thus, untranslatable words are never isolated in the text. As Iveković pointed out, they exist within a context that helps us to better understand them.

This example raises one more important question: who and by what criteria declares a certain term to be untranslatable? It seems to me that the tradition of translation in Slavonic languages illustrates how the concept of "untranslatability" should be taken with some caution, because the inference of such a status always depends on one's perspective. In other words, we should always be asking ourselves: for whom is a certain term untranslatable? With that being said, we should keep in mind that *The Dictionary of Untranslatables* derives from a uniquely French perspective on translation. In the preface to *The Dictionary of Untranslatables* Apter says:

Accordingly, entries compare and meditate on the specific difference furnished to concepts by the Arabic, Basque, Catalan, Danish, English, French, German, Greek (classical and modern), Hebrew, Hungarian, Latin, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, and Spanish languages (Cassin 2014: vii).

Yet, these terms are not treated in mutual interrelation through which a complex network of travel and intersection of terms, listed in the lexicon, would be outlined. Rather, the terms are processed in a one-sided relation to French culture. Apter argues that the lexicon is intended for anyone who is interested "in the cartography of languages or the impact of translation history on the course of philosophy" (Cassin 2014: vii). However, this map is extremely centralized, where all roads lead to France. Moreover, *The Dictionary of Untranslatables,* on the one hand, celebrates multilingualism while, on the other hand, emphasizes linguistic nationality by stereotyping the culture of certain languages: "PORTUGUESE becomes a hymn to the sensibility of the baroque, with Fado (fate, lassitude, melancholia) its emblematic figure. GERMAN hews to the language of Kant and Hegel "(Cassin 2014: xiii). Therefore, the question remains unsolved: can this kind of approach in *The Dictionary of Untranslatable* be called philosophizing in tongues? Finally, does such an approach really challenge the monoligualism of world literature?

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Notes

[1] The use of the expression "Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian language" requires a detailed explanation. After the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s and the subsequent emergence of independent national states in this region, the official language called Serbo-Croatian disintegrated as well. Due to nationalist language politics, Serbo-Croatian became separated into Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian languages. However, these national languages still belong to one common language field. In this specific language frame, I am examining the topic of philosophical translation. Until the 1990s, foreign philosophical texts, mostly translated into Serbo-Croatian, strongly influenced philosophical ideas in the respective language field of BCMS as a whole. Keeping this in mind, it is futile to analyse any philosophical translation in these particular languages without understanding how they all belong to one language field: BCMS (Cf. Folnović Jaitner 2016).

[2] *Nadvladani jezik preuzima gotove riječi-pojmove onog drugog, ali ostaje u bitnome spram njih ravnodušan i njima netaknut te ono svoje i vlastito povlači u skriveniju unutrašnjost i očuvava ga pod cijenu sve dublje potisnutosti u neartikuliranu neodređenost nekog fluidnog praugođaja. S tim zajedno onda ide i zatvorenost i bitno sljepilo za pravu snagu i puni smisaoni domašaj preuzete riječi, njena svijet-otvarajuća moć ostaje nespoznata i zapravo nijema. Jednako tako, s druge strane, sama tuđica ostaje unutar osvojenog jezika-govora u svojevrsnoj pobjedničkoj izolaciji, ne ulazi u živo odnošenje s drugim riječima i ne učestvuje u onom živom sveprenošenju značenja, koje smo kao sveopću metaforičnost prirodnoga govora i izvorište njegove vječno nove životnosti bili ranije upoznali. Tako ostaje tuđica na neki način mrtvo tijelo u živome tkivu jezika-govora* […] (Barbarić 1992: 179-180)

[3] There are two complete translations of *Sein und Zeit*. The first one was published in Zagreb (1985), translated by Hrvoje Šarinić and the second one was published in Belgrade (2007), translated by Miloš Todorović.

[4] The examples given below are taken from two existing BCMS translations of *Sein und Zeit*. The first translation was published in 1985 in Zagreb, translated by Hrvoje Šarinić (the second, unchanged edition follows in 1988), and the second by Miloš Todorović in 2007 in Belgrade.

[5] Original quote: *"Die durchschnittliche Alltäglichkeit des Daseins kann demnach bestimmt werden als das verfallend-erschlossene, geworfen-entwerfende In-der-Welt-sein, dem es in seinem Sein bei der „Welt" und im Mitsein mit Anderen um das eigenste Seinkönnen selbst geht"* (SZ: 181).

⁶ Original quote: "*Komponenta Da, koju smo ovdje preveli sa tu, sugerira i mnogo više od toga. Njemačko da ne znači samo prostorno tu, nego, među ostalim i tada, pa je njim već nagoviještena i temporalna interpretacija čovjekova bivstvovanja i bivstvovanja uopće*" (Heidegger 1985: xxv-xxvi).

⁷ Original quote: „... *je mehr Jemand immer wieder danach trachtet, Dasein als Substantiv und Substanz bestimmen, desto mehr trifft die Zeitlichkeit des Zeitwortes Sein hervor und die Unmöglichkeit anzeigt, das Sein als Substanz und den Sinn von Sein als Gehalt zu finden.*" (Sa Calvacante Schuback 2005: 211).

⁸ Original quote: „*Izvorno glagolsko značenje imenice "Dasein" je da sein; npr. „Ich bin da", što bismo u normalnom jezičnom kontekstu preveli s „evo me" ili „tu sam". Koliko god različita bila mnogobrojna tumačenja Heideggerove filozofije i njezinih pojmova, nepobitnim se može smatrati da je za njegovo mišljenje temeljno ovo izvorno glagolsko značenje, značenje svakodnevnoga govora. Mi doduše u hrvatskome, za razliku od engleskog i francuskog, to „tu sam" možemo substantivirati, ali je „tubitak" naravno donekle izmišljena riječ, koja se teško prihvaća.*" (Melčić in Heidegger 1999: 44).

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The Subtitle Wagging the Screen: The Untranslated and *One Second*'s Cultural Revolution

SHENG-MEI MA

Instead of the tail wagging the dog, the few English words at the bottom of the screen, big and small, tell the tale of Chinese-language films and TV series for the global Anglophone audience. This common Americanism suggests the irony that a little, negligible thing or body part like a dog's tail has come to dominate the story itself. Practically, the subtitles speak for the foreign-language film. In the hands of amateurs, the subtitles not only wag the screen—they whack it, twisting it all out of shape like bad TV reception. This universal pitfall deepens in the case of modern China. To rephrase Chairman Mao's dictum regarding women holding up half the sky, the English subtitles apparently hold up the whole sky; they (mis)speak on behalf of the show, missing egregiously when the Red Sky over the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and beyond does not particularly wish to be wagged, "woked." The whole sky turns out to be a big hole, a crime scene's bullet hole shot through Chinese consciousness of the *People's Republic of Amnesia*, as Louisa Lim calls the country in 2014. Such weight of political censorship compounds inherent fissures between the alphabet of written English, added extradiegetically in post-production, and the tonal oral Chinese recorded live on location. The translatable and the anglicizable thus clings onto the edge of the screen like a rock climber's fingerhold, suspended over the abyss of the unsayable in collective memory.

Zhang Yimou's 2020 film *One Second* scarcely survives such layers of translation from traumatic experiences fictionalized in Yan Geling's Chinese-language novel *Prisoner Lu Yanshi* (2011) and filmscripts to filmic narratives, not just *One Second* but also its predecessor *Coming Home* (2014). Political headwinds prevented Zhang's film from its premiere in the 2019 Berlin Film Festival. Not yet approved by the Beijing authority for global release and doubtful that it ever will, a pirate version with Chinese subtitles quietly materializes on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqcGwQhLjck, which could be taken offline even as we speak, its existence as fleeting as any subtitle. Another pirate version with atrocious English subtitles is subsequently uploaded: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSwGiOsh5Y4. Similar fate may befall the English version, which is just as well.

In current Chinese lingo, these pirate versions on YouTube are *shanzhai* versions. Shanzhai, mountain strongholds for rebels throughout the history of imperial China, lies at the heart of the revolt of the insurgent, populist Chinese Communist Party (CCP) against colonialism and feudalism in the name of the proletariat of workers, peasants, and soldiers. Shanzhai has evolved to designate any counterfeit product or practice that imitate, even parody, others, causing tremendous harm to consumers, endangering their health and finances, both domestically and internationally. Shanzhai is translated by Allan H. Barr as "Copycat" in Yu Hua's *China in Ten Words* (2011). Even in an Old China Hand like Barr's, the translation of "Copycat" elides the fact that this cat does more than copying: it is quite catty, red in tooth and claw. With *One Second*'s shanzhai versions widely available, the CCP's success as an anti-establishment renegade has come back to haunt itself: what it prohibits has been disseminated surreptitiously through social

media. Despite the makeshift, even slapdash quality of the English version, it befits the very definition of shanzhai in defying the CCP authority devoted to self-preservation, even self-glorification.

The protagonist Zhang Jiusheng played by Zhang Yi in *One Second* escapes from a Cultural Revolution labor camp in search of a pre-film propaganda newsreel where his supposedly deceased daughter cameoed for a split second, hence the film's title. Like the father's quest for one second out of an hours-long feature, the film leaves unsaid and unseen much of the context: Where did the escaped convict come from? Which crime did he commit? What happened to his daughter, who had apparently denounced him for her own survival? Why did he seek out an image of his daughter rather than her real self? What is the real and what is the reel? Similar occlusions and repressions enshroud the female lead Liu Girl and the supporting actor Fan Movie. Liu Girl is played by Liu Haocun, her name in the film but a nickname because she and her brother called "Liu Younger Brother" have grown up nameless orphans to parents who had perished during, if not due to, the fanatic and bloody campaign. Fan Movie is played by Fan Wei, whose nickname in the film honors this touring propaganda film projectionist. His son is mentally challenged for having helped himself to his father's film solution, which damaged the young child's brain. That the actors' "real" Chinese surnames become their "reel" surnames plays into, unwittingly, the homophones in English.

The preceding exegesis has gone beyond a literal translation of the filmic universe, diving into the unspoken, the inferred within the Chinese context as well as into the intercultural and cross-generic give-and-take. Hence, translation in *One Second* constitutes not only a linguistic practice from fiction to film, from Chinese dialogues to English subtitles, but also a cultural practice from lived experiences to artistic expressions and political suppressions. As such, *One Second* and other narratives of the Cultural Revolution are a cliff-hanger climbing up from the valley of "the Ten-year Holocaust," barely hanging on just like the flash of "white" light, the thin line of English subtitles, before they sink out of frame. *One Second*'s untranalstability on account of political censorship and cultural parameters is entirely different from Walter Benjamin's philosophical reveries in "The Task of the Translator" (1955). Benjamin projects his utopian vision of art-for-art's sake onto translation, totally unconcerned with reader reception. By contrast, the untranslated in *One Second* stems not from a ritualistic divine source, but from the precarity over speaking out. Benjamin has the luxury of musing about the translator's task in theory; Zhang Yimou, as world-renowned as he is, must attend to the consequences of such musing in practice. Benjamin can afford to divorce his rumination from real life; Zhang's reality hinges on self-censorship.

Let us start, in Yeats's words, from "where all the ladders start," the bottom of paltry, shoddy English subtitles. In a film that thrives on the filmic language of body gestures and dynamic movements with few spoken words, the practically first attempt at dialogue is mistranslated. After loading up the film reels on his moped, the projectionist Fan's assistant Yang He (rendered as "Yanghe") appears ready to leave at night for the next screening site. To a surprised friend, Yang He responds: "Fan film [Fan Movie] is looking for any fault. Who dare go at night?" The rhetorical question translates, literally, *sheigan zouyelu* when it means figuratively: "Who dare play hooky!" or "Who dare cut corners!" Yang's rhetorical question confirms his intention of immediate departure, contrary to the erroneous subtitle. Yang He takes to the road dutifully, nighttime notwithstanding, to deliver the film reels.

Inept, home-made translation continues unabated. After their physical, even brutal, scuffle over the film reel Liu stole from Yang He's moped, Zhang Jiusheng offers an apology: "I wouldn't beat u if I knew y r girl"; "Why you steal this, sale it?" No matter

how subpar, the subtitles do fill the void left by political censorship. Availing oneself of the English version, alas, afflicts the global reception of *One Second*. Liu's vulgar rejoinder to Zhang's question, "*Guanni pishi*," is gentrified as "It isn't your business," which loses the sting of the original "It's none of your Goddamn business" or even worse with the f-word in place of the G-word. A tramp's tough talk from the gutter is softened for "ears polite" of the world. No translation is perhaps preferable to bad translation; no memory preferable to bad or planted memory. The choice between an empty glass and a poisoned chalice should be obvious. Conceivably, broad-minded non-Sinophone cinephiles could watch it like a silent film without comprehending the dialogue, helped along by the plethora of universal grunts, cries, laughter, and non-lingual sounds. The cinephile's feeling of disorientation offers a visceral taste of the confusion and uncertainty that the protagonist Zhang and millions of victims like him had suffered. Perhaps it is too harsh to call the English version a poisoned chalice. A bottle of corked wine, then, where the translator's good intentions are betrayed by incompetence.

This unintentional misspeaking fails the film's minimalist representation, one that leaves much to be intuited. From the bottom subtitles, the "lowest" common denominator of film language, let us lift our eyes to study the amorphous images on the screen, transcribed onto the viewer's mental screen as synaptic (mis)firing between a little-known Chinese past and a virtual present, if not perpetual on YouTube. The known at our fingertips triggers the unknown from a strange country of a distant time. The mistranslation over Yang He's imminent night ride leads into the dark, unknown Cultural Revolution for the new millennium.

The unfathomable cataclysm uncoils through recurring, defamiliarizing motifs that are, nonetheless, familiar to every human being: families, or rather, broken families of fathers and daughters, either party dead or lost or estranged. The thematic unfolding of one of the oldest human relationships constitutes a metanarrative, a mise en abyme, each frame within the frame reflecting the others through the unspooling of films and of family relationships. On our digital devices, we in 2021 and beyond watch Zhang Yimou's film, where Fan Movie projects the propaganda film *Heroic Sons and Daughters* (1964) by way of the rotation of an obsolete analog 35 mm film strip. Parallel viewings coexist within Zhang's film; they also coexist within the film and without, as you and I are shocked by the horror, moved by the anguish. Within *One Second*, villagers watch the propaganda film that is on tour, circling the countryside, whereas Zhang Jiusheng waits for that second in the pre-film newsreel. The spirit of ever-lasting martyrdom eulogized in *Heroic Sons and Daughters* is but a vehicle for the bereaved father's brief séance with the departed soul. The cyclical nature resides as much in the touring film reels as in Zhang Jiusheng being treated to what Fan Movie, after the public screening, has spliced together for his eyes only—the small number of frames in a loop where his daughter comes alive again and again. That one flicker illuminating the ghost of a daughter deconstructs the Chinese tradition of family. Fan Movie applies glue to reattach film stocks, the very glue that turned Fan's son dim-witted. The magic of a professional projectionist so mesmerizes Zhang that he is unaware of having been betrayed by Fan to the village authority. Witnessing the severe beating Zhang endured upon arrest, an apologetic Fan performs one last sleight of hand, sliding into Zhang's coat pocket two frames of his daughter's negative.

Negative is the word. Instead of the real daughter, Zhang keeps close to his heart her likeness, albeit overexposed. Yet even the negative keepsake is confiscated by the authority, which discards it like trash en route to the prison. His daughter's negative is soon buried under the sea of blowing sand. When Zhang is released from the labor camp two years later in an epilogue of happy ending, he searches in vain, with Liu

Girl's help, for the negative in the barren desert. Sensing the futility of their effort, the father-daughter pair exchange resigned smiles, gazing into the infinite stretch of sand. They have, in the end, each other. This tableau of lost-and-found segues into a rather melodramatic closing credits with Liu Haocun. Now restored to a chic twenty-something, her well-groomed ponytail cascading down the back of a baseball cap, Liu sings softly, at times whispering, the theme song "One Second" into the microphone, wiping off a tear or two spontaneously. This sensitive touch is not totally unexpected, given that the street urchin's smeared face and tattered clothes have been redeemed throughout by her pretty looks and fashionably unkempt, frizzy bouffant hairdo straight out of the "skin job" Pris's (Daryl Hannah) coiffure in *Bladerunner* (1982) or Maggie Cheung's in *Chinese Box* (1997). If Zhang Yimou ventures into China's dirty past, Liu Haocun's hair styling is already sanitized. If the epilogue's post-Cultural Revolution return to normalcy, not only personal freedom but also the possibility of a new family, intends to heal the primal wound by squatting at the heels of official narratives, the subsequent ban proves that the filmmaker has failed. If Liu's tearful singing intends to provide a closure, rounding off the sharp edges of collective memory, the subsequent ascent of Liu's stardom contrasts sharply with the nameless daughter's descent into the hourglass of history.

Singing has a way of lingering in the ear long after it is done, which presents yet another contrast. The fruitless hunt for the negative in the desert is accompanied by a high-pitched, heart-wrenching female vocal, possibly a rustic folk song in local dialect, unintelligible to the majority of Sinophone viewers. This is theonly place absent of Chinese subtitles. A post-production technical oversight? Conceivably, it could be an ingenious move to suggest the emotional intensity soaring far beyond words, rendering subtitles inoperative, redundant. Against this searing "surround sound," the new father and daughter bond over the realization of all that is lost: the past is a roll of negatives, each frame produced by the fleeting present. The indecipherable soundtrack then eases into Liu's "One Second" of the closing credits, the only place of the film with both Chinese and English subtitles. Liu's tears and twice-translated lyrics spell the end of the nameless, faceless folk singer's no lyrics.

The film's father-daughter mise en abyme involves intertextuality. *Heroic Sons and Daughters* is based on the novelist Ba Jin's 1961 reportage *Reunion* on the Korean War. Dispatched by Beijing to the Korean theater in the early 1950s, Ba Jin in a first-person narrative tells the story of a Party Secretary, Director Wang, spotting among the People's Volunteer Army (PVA) at the Korean War his long-lost daughter Wang Fang. (The PVA from China included Mao's eldest son Mao Anying, who was killed by American bombing in 1950.) Over a decade ago, Director Wang was forced to entrust his young daughter to a janitor in order to join the communist underground activities in Shanghai. Personal sacrifice of the father and the daughter comes to a tear-jerking happy ending as they are reunited in the Korean theater of war to entertain Chinese theatergoers. The film version juxtaposes this family reunion with a People's Liberation Army martyr's self-immolation for the sake of the collective family of China and North Korea. The martyr happens to be Wang Fang's adoptive brother who radios the artillery what has become a catchphrase "For victory, fire at me!", as he has inserted himself amidst the phalanx of American invaders. His last words ricochet from the 1964 black-and-white footage to Zhang's 2021 film, which, in reverse shots, captures the villagers' eyes welling up. Zhang's "quotations" of an old film elicit villagers' tears and perhaps our sneers. One father finds his daughter, who in turn loses her adoptive brother, who in turn is apotheosized in communist pantheon, who in turn is almost an object of ridicule to millennial China weaned on "socialism with Chinese characteristics," a.k.a.,

wolfish capitalism in good communist lamb's clothes. The early Ba Jin found repulsive traditional families, such as in the celebrated *The Torrents Trilogy* that opened with *The Family* (1933); the late Ba Jin mellowed to sing of revolutionary families.

This play on reversals of past and present, of ressentiment and reform, infuses the film, an ironic gallows humor that insulates the absurd horror, the horrible absurdity, of the Cultural Revolution. Zhang and Liu put on an act of estranged father and daughter when they are picked up consecutively along a desolate road by an unwitting truck driver, each blaming the other for having abandoned the family. With the driver playing the fool, this skit in the truck cab amounts to verbal and physical commedia dell'arte. The audience laugh through tears, bracing themselves against the bleak desert landscape and ceaseless human betrayals. The funnyman Fan Wei's tour de force as Fan Movie also sustains the comic streak throughout, a harmonic relaxing to counterpoint the contraction over father–daughter relationships and of our hearts.

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Notes on Translation and Untranslatability in Philosophy and Culture (Russia and Europe)

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Translation is a business that has always been and will always be needed in this world as long as there are commerce and diplomacy, science and literature, philosophy and everyday life issues, in short – the need for communication between people of different languages and different cultures. Today, however, translation is more than a technical support for human contacts. We no longer see it as a mere intermediary in exchanges between languages and cultures. It has acquired a new and much more important status, serving as a key prerequisite for cognition in the humanities and social sciences. Moreover, translation has become a philosophical issue and even a philosophical category (philosophical categories are not eternal, they can change). A number of cultural–historical and methodological considerations can be adduced to bolster this point (Avtonomova 2008; 2016). On the historical-philosophical level, translation can be seen as the latest form of problematizing language: after mind thinking itself has been superseded by language as the main issue of philosophy, several stages of what was called 'the linguistic turn' followed: understanding, dialogue, communication, and now translation (and, consequently, untranslatability) came successively to the fore. On the operational and methodological level, translation became a kind of paradigm – a model of an approach that is essential to the most diverse fields of research in the humanities.

Translation in a Narrow and in a Broad Sense

Reflecting on the fate and possibilities of translation in knowledge production, in culture and in life, we inevitably face the necessity to distinguish between different meanings of the very notion of translation. Translation in its narrow and proper sense is translation between different languages; it is the one that lends itself most easily to operationalization and provides an illustrative model of what is done in other areas of knowledge and culture production. Translation in a broad sense comprises many things including periphrasis (intralingual translation) or inter-semiotic translation, i.e. one between different communicative systems (for example, from novel to film). These are types of translation Roman Jakobson singled out in his famous work (Jakobson 233). There is, however, an even broader range of translation issues including ones of translating not from one linguistic (semiotic, discourse) system into another, but from a non-verbal experience into an articulated one. The possibility of such translations attracted the attention of Yuri Lotman, who analyzed the functioning of culture as memory ("…placing a fact into the collective memory bears all signs of translation from one language into another, in this case – to the 'language of culture'", cf. Lotman 329). Translation in a broad sense is also translation between concepts. This is what Thomas Kuhn resorted to in his search for a way out of the deadlock caused by incommensurability of theories (Kuhn, Postscript–1969. Section 5). This play of perspectives in our understanding of translation must be kept in mind at all times, although it is, of course, translation in the proper sense that shall serve as the conceptual anchor in this paper.

Translation issues are extremely topical these days, and the awareness of this is growing both in Russia and in the West, where it is associated with shifting boundaries, including linguistic ones, with reassessment of cultural, economic and political values, and with the expansion of international interactions. In post-Soviet Russia, along with the same universal issues and interests, there seems to be a particularly acute need to construct (or to "re-create") a Russian conceptual language, without which thought cannot be articulate and effective. Translation plays a very important role in this work.

Since the beginning of the post-Soviet transition in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Russian philosophers have been acutely aware of the need to overcome conceptual deficits that had accrued during the decades of isolation from contemporary Western thought as well as from Russian philosophical heritage (religious and not only). At the same time, mastering foreign conceptual experience and mastering domestic historical experience are enterprises that require deciphering conceptual languages unfamiliar to Russian thinkers of today. They face a double cultural translation task. In the early 1990s, access to international information was still scarce, and the Russian conceptual language was far from being mature and complete. It was clearly unsuitable for articulating new life and cognitive experiences. In some respects, however, the post-Soviet period, peculiar as it is, is not really unique. Extremely simplifying history and leaving aside its subtle twists and turns, we can outline several more periods of Russia's opening to the West and, accordingly, of intensive translation work which was made necessary each time by the evolution of Russian society and culture. These periods are, roughly, the post-Petrine time in the 18th century, the post-Napoleonic time in the 19th century, and a short time before and after the 1917 revolution in the 20th century. They all bear a specific similarity with the post-Soviet period.

On Translation in Russian History

In the era that began after Peter the Great had "opened a window on Europe", Vasily Trediakovsky (1703–1768) and Antiochus Kantemir (1708–1744) were remarkable translators who, in the process of translation, developed a Russian conceptual language. In one of his programmatic works (Trediakovsky 481-561) Trediakovsky criticizes the "enemies of wisdom" (above all Jean-Jacques Rousseau) and asserts intellectual activity (*umstvovanie*) as the main positive quality of the human race. In order to strengthen and develop the mental ability in his fellow citizens, he works carefully and systematically on the creation of a Russian philosophical language. In this treatise, he seeks and/or invents Russian equivalents for a number of basic concepts of European philosophy, consistently citing their Latin, and – towards the end of the text – French prototypes in the footnotes. Among those cited by Trediakovsky are, for example, Russian equivalents of such fundamental Latin and modern European notions as existentia (*bytnost'*), substantia (*sushchestvo*), essentia (*sushchnost'*), mens (*um*), intellectus purus (*razum*), intelligentia (*razumnost'*), sensatio (*chuvstvennost'*), experientia (*upotreblenie*) and others.

The second epoch during which the shortcomings of Russian conceptual language were realized and addressed, was the post-Napoleonic time associated with the names of such writers and thinkers as Alexander Pushkin, Pyotr Vyazemsky, and Pyotr Chaadayev. Alongside with writing prose and poetry, all of them translated from Western European languages. In a letter of July 13, 1825, Pushkin wrote to Vyazemsky: "Sooner or later it ought be said aloud that our Russian metaphysical language is still in a wild state. God willing, it will someday develop to resemble the French (a clear and exact language of prose, i.e., the language of thought). I have three verses about this in *Onegin*" (Pushkin, vol. 10, 120). Of course, the word "metaphysical" here denotes a general language of concepts, not a section of philosophy. However, Pushkin notes a general lack of notions in sciences and in philosophy: "... science, politics and philosophy have not been explicated

in Russian yet – we do not have any metaphysical language at all, ... even in casual correspondence we have to create new phrases to explicate the most ordinary notions" (Pushkin, vol. 7, 14). The conceptual language kept developing after Pushkin, but much more slowly than he had wanted it to.

The next formative time period was the beginning of the 20th century. Prior to the 1917 revolution, some of Husserl's and the neo-Kantians' works were translated into Russian, and some of Freud's works were published in Russia even earlier than in Western Europe. On the fate of psychoanalysis in Russia and the translation issues arising in this connection, see our article published in a special issue on translation and psychoanalysis (Avtonomova 2002a, 175-186). Orientation toward the West continued in the 1920s due to the hope of a global revolution and the necessity to "learn from bourgeois experts". Intense as this exchange was, however, the predominance of Marxist concepts (across the spectrum from creative to dogmatic use of them) soon began to hinder work with the concepts of other philosophical doctrines.

As a consequence, the goal of developing a conceptual language could not even be set, since the Marxist language was being presented more and more as something unchangeable and universally applicable. In the Soviet time, works by ancient thinkers, by the "forerunners of Marxism" (mainly French socialists and German classical philosophers), and by many modern philosophers were translated into Russian. But products of 20th century Western philosophical thought were accessible only to few scholars specializing in "criticism of modern bourgeois philosophy." Very few translations in this field were published, and every such publication was a milestone.

As I have already noted, apart from opening to the pre-revolutionary and émigré Russian heritage, the post-Soviet time saw a new opening to the West. In general, the bulk of literature in the humanities and social sciences was translated from English, except in philosophy, where translations of contemporary French authors' works led the way for a number of years. Anglo-American analytic empiricism never had too many admirers in Russia, and German thought discouraged Russian readers with its pronounced systematicity and strong neo-Marxist tradition to which the post-Soviet readers were allergic. It was in contemporary French philosophy that they seemed to find what they were looking for: a generalized critical pathos, a vivid style, and genre diversity. However, many failures and misunderstandings occurred as ideas of French philosophers were being translated from one culture to another.

It was French philosophy of the 1960s and 1970s that enjoyed – at least in the beginning – the greatest popularity with Russian translators and readers. It had its history in France, but it had no history in Russia. In France, this philosophy was about criticism of the European rationalist tradition, criticism of the subjectivist philosophies that preceded it, above all of existentialism, and, in the end, criticism of the 1960s' structuralism itself. For unprepared Russian readers, these different French criticisms merged into a single nihilistic protest. The stylistic complexity and sophistication of French philosophical writing (which probably was, among other things, a reaction to strong academism and to the dogmatism of rigid interdisciplinary boundaries) was perceived in Russia as a characteristic feature of the new philosophy par excellence. At that, the overall landscape of French philosophical thought, which was actually quite diverse, remained invisible to Russian readers. Thus, the conceptual content of French philosophy was perceived in Russia primarily as a spirit of generalized criticality and aesthetic breakthroughs. While in the West Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Lacan, Lyotard, and many other French thinkers had already made their way into the university curricula, Russia lacked (and sometimes still lacks) basic reference handbooks or companions that are necessary for studying their works. The publishing and reception history of each of these authors deserves a separate study.

Facing the Untranslatable in Personal Translation Experience – Soviet and Post-Soviet

In what follows, I am going to focus primarily on the experience of translating from other languages into Russian and using Western concepts for making an up-to-date Russian philosophical language. It is in this field that I myself have been active translating and introducing works by French philosophical and human scientific thought into Soviet and post-Soviet Russian culture. My experience has shown that in addition to certain specific difficulties of linguistic, cultural, and historical nature, translators often encountered social or ideological obstacles and untranslatability issues which they attempted to overcome with varying degrees of success.

The fact that a Russian translation of Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* (Foucault 1977; 1994) was published in Brezhnev's Soviet Union was a true Soviet miracle, given that the book contained, among other things, unflattering statements concerning Marxism. Despite the restrictive markings "For scholarly libraries only," its 5,000 copies became available to a fairly wide circle of Russian-speaking readers, who received the book with great interest and enthusiasm. But miracles don't happen often: publishing Russian translations of Foucault's other books became possible only some fifteen to twenty years later, in the post-Soviet time (Avtonomova, 2019).

Another bright moment in my translation practice was the encounter with a kind of *ideological untranslatability* that, unlike Foucault's book, could not be overcome during the Soviet period. I was confronted with it while translating a book on the history of psychotherapeutic doctrines written by Léon Chertok (a French psychiatrist and specialist in hypnosis) and Raymond de Saussure (a Swiss psychoanalyst, once president of the Swiss Psychoanalytic Association). Its Russian edition was to be entitled *The Birth of the Psychoanalyst* (Shertok, Sossiur de). The book was not even about psychoanalysis itself but about the psychotherapeutic practices that preceded it. I translated it shortly after the Tbilisi Symposium on the Unconscious (1979) which rehabilitated, in a sense, the very idea of the unconscious which had been ostracized for decades from Soviet psychology since the 1930s when Freudianism was banned in the USSR. Psychoanalysis was still prohibited as of the late 1970s. Therefore, the mere word 'psychoanalyst' in the title of a book was enough to make it unfit for publication in the Soviet Union, despite Léon Chertok's willingness to change the title to, say, *The Odyssey of Psychotherapy*. After I finished the translation, the Progress Publishing House took another ten years to publish it, and it was not until after the collapse of the Soviet regime in 1991 that the book was out!

Due to the long hiatus in the Soviet/Russian research and practice of psychoanalysis, I was bound to encounter *terminological* untranslatability issues in my next work, and that was a translation of one of the best European dictionaries of classical Freudianism, the one compiled by Laplanche and Pontalis (Laplanche, Pontalis 1967; Laplansh, Pontalis, 1996; 2010; 2016). No wonder, since almost 60 years of psychoanalytic practice and usage of psychoanalytic concepts had dropped out. The Russian translations of books on psychoanalysis that had been published in Russia and abroad in the meantime could do little to help. 350 notions had to be translated, some of them – anew, preserving as much as possible the word families and taking into account the experience of psychoanalytic conceptualization in other languages and cultures (the dictionary features concepts in German, English, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian). While translating the dictionary, a good Russian equivalent for a key Freudian term such as *Besetzung* was prompted to me, if I may say so, by the Romanic languages. *Besetzung* is translated as *carga* in Spanish and Portuguese, or *carica* in Italian, which led me to opt for the Russian word *nagruzka*. It is in keeping with Freud's "energetic" concept of psyche and, importantly, allows forming concepts close in meaning (*razgruzka, protivonagruzka, sverkhnagruzka,*

etc.) just like the German words and expressions *Entziehung der Besetzung, Gegenbesetzung, Überbesetzung*, etc. do. As far as I know, neither other Russian translations nor French ones preserved this conceptual unity. As for the French and English translations of *Besetzung* (*investissment* and *cathexis*, respectively), they are sometimes found in Russian texts as "investitsiia" and "kateksis," but they have almost lost the semantic connection between them and certainly are not perceived any longer as translations of the same German term. Reasons for my opting for some term or another are elaborated on in my preface to the first edition of the Dictionary as well as in the preface and afterword to its revised second edition.

Finally, here is an example of yet another kind of untranslatability, a one that I would call *conceptual and stylistic*. In translating Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (Derrida; on the reception of *Of Grammatology* see Avtonomova 2002: 85-92; 2004: 400-404), the main difficulty I encountered was the impossibility of simultaneously and fully reproducing both the framework of basic concepts and the author's 'postmodern'-style playing with word consonances. I opted for the former, because I realized that it would be impossible to translate everything with an equal measure of precision. My choice is polemical, knowing other Russian translations of Derrida which could be described as *imitative*, i.e. imitating the author's style, or *intuitive*, i.e. hiding from the reader the reasons for the translator's choice of concepts and terms. I prioritized the choice of equivalents and tried primarily to keep the chosen ones throughout the text so as to make them recognizable to the reader and to preserve the lines of thought they served. I translated *différance,* Derrida's most famous concept, as *razlichanie*, while other translators use such words as *razlichenie*, *otkladyvanie*, *otlozhenie*, sometimes using different words in different contexts. The dictionary word *différence* differs from Derrida's neo-graphism *différance* by 'just' one letter that is visible to the eye but imperceptible to the ear (*différance* is pronounced the same way as *différence*). The distinction between *différence* and *différance* is inaudible. The inaudible letter 'a' in *différance* makes the word "erroneous," constantly breaking out of the system, emphasizing the distinction of difference as the opposite of identity. Moreover, the letter 'a' in *razlichanie* (as opposed to the normative *razlichenie*) is associated with the imperfect form of the Russian verb and suggests an ongoing action of distinguishing. *Razlichanie*, one might say, removes the metaphysical distinction between writing and speaking, which would favor speech – the voice, the logos, the fullness of presence.

Last year, a special issue of the electronic journal ITER was published, prepared by an international group of French-speaking philosophers under the slogan "Translate Derrida" (ITER). My article *Deconstruction and Translation: on the Reception of Derrida in Russia* (Avtonomova 2020) was published there too – among other articles which analyzed reception and translation of Derrida's work in Bulgarian, Czech, Polish, Spanish, Japanese, Chinese, Turkish, English and other languages. This issue of the journal, dedicated to the memory of Marguerite Derrida, also includes two hitherto unpublished texts by Jacques Derrida on translation. One cannot fail to recognize the usefulness of such international work: it is important for translators to compare the types of difficulties they encounter and to share their experiences concerning difficult cases of conceptual translation. I would like to mention here another new collective work – a volume edited by David M. Spitzer, containing my article on translation and untranslatability (Avtonomova, 2020a); this book (Spitzer) with its broad international team of contributors requires a separate in-depth discussion.

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The peculiarity of my approach in all these cases is the emphasis on the terminological and epistemological aspect. Of all the general linguistic, sociological, and cultural

anthropological approaches to translation, I am most interested in the ones that view translation as cognition and cognition as translation. Thus, rather than prioritizing prose or poetry translation (this topic involves special discussion of aesthetic criteria for the quality of translation work, which I am not going into now), I focus on translation in the fields of philosophy, social sciences and humanities. I think that an epistemological approach to translation allows us to absorb and take into account a maximum of the practice experience and reflection. Of course, intuition, ingenuity, and personal involvement always pertain to translation as a practice, but here I would like to emphasize the cognitive, discursive, intersubjectively meaningful aspects of translation which I see primarily as a helper to working thought, a reflexive resource that allows us to understand by analogy other mechanisms of scientific cognition. Derrida once said writing is everywhere. I say translation is everywhere, although I cannot agree with the thesis that there are no originals. Analysis of translation mechanisms often reveals something that is not usually seen in other forms and kinds of cognition: namely, how different layers and fragments of experience move from the sphere of the implicit and unexpressed to the sphere of what is accessible to operationalization and intersubjective verification.

The Aporias of Translation

Translating means, above all, going through trials of many different kinds. Trials of scholarly and linguistic nature are undergone by the original text, by the translator's language, and by translators themselves, who are accountable to their two masters – the source language and their own mother tongue – who may be placing different demands on them. How to get out of this aporia? The difficulty is that it is impossible to love everything equally, and if you cherish a little bit of the original and a little bit of your mother tongue, it leads nowhere good. This can be called Schleiermacher's aporia, because it was he who first noticed (and problematized) that there are two fundamentally different ways of translating: bringing the author closer to the reader and bringing the reader closer to the author. A conscious choice must be made between the two lest the original and the target language miss each other altogether. This, however, is not a deadlocked antinomy but a productive aporia which encourages movement, according to Derrida. Antoine Berman uses the terms *langue de départ* (departure language) and *langue d'arrivée* (destination language), thus introducing a journey metaphor – very appropriate here – into translation terminology. This problem is always solved one way or another based on the respective context, depending on how the translators understand their task, but these solutions should always be presented to the reader.

To understand how Schleiermacher's antinomy is resolved in the history of cultures and in the practice of translation, one can look at examples of repeated translations of significant texts done in different times. The first translations are usually made in order to acquaint readers with new contents and therefore emphasize the 'reader pole' to the detriment of the 'original pole', while subsequent translations pay more attention to the texture of the original and its signifying structure, trying to more fully implement what Antoine Berman called the "testing by a foreign land" (Berman 25). Both approaches, as Mikhail Gasparov has emphasized, have their own cultural tasks which correspond to more general and time-specific needs of the development of society and its enlightenment. "In this process, there are alternating phases of spreading culture outward and depthward. 'Spreading outward' means that culture takes hold of a new stratum of society rapidly but superficially, in simplified forms, as general familiarizing rather than internal assimilation, as a learned norm rather than creative transformation. 'Spreading depthward' means that the circle of bearers of culture does not change noticeably, but their familiarity with culture becomes deeper, its acquisition more creative, and its manifestations more complex"

(Gasparov 128-129). This dynamic is clearly seen in translations of fiction, but it can also be observed in repeated translations of philosophical, psychoanalytic, and scholarly texts.

Recognition of Untranslatability and Elucidation of Blind Spots

To be sure, the untranslatability discussion does not arise out of thin air: untranslatability phenomena surround us and penetrate various aspects of our existence. We have different conditions of life, our languages are not interchangeable, they do not overlap. Their sound matter (the signifying side) differs, and they structure reality in different ways. To show this, we do not even need to turn to exotic languages. For example, the coexistence of English and French in bilingual Canada sometimes causes big problems: for example, in the field of law, the coexistence of English case law and French law (the Napoleonic Code), each with its own terms anchored in the respective language, makes legal terminological interaction very difficult. But we do not even have to delve into special areas of translation practice. We can confine ourselves to the everyday semantic and morphological incongruity between certain phenomena of English and French. For example, translating English gerunds into French produces a 'black-and-white error'. If we translate *doing smth means...* as *le fait que... signifie que...*, it leads to *doing* (which is a process not fact) being translated as a fact, distorting its meaning. Here is another example: in Greek or Latin the verb *to be* is both a copula and an indication of the subject's existence (indeed, in Greek this verb has not two, but a dozen meanings), and therefore its translation truncates its meaning when a text is translated into languages like Russian where this verb is not used as an obligatory copula. Hence the Latin sentence *Deus bonus est ergo Deus est* (by which the very *existence* of God is deduced from the premise that God *is* good) cannot be used for reasoning in Russian, because in Russian the existence of God is not grammatically deducible from His goodness. But does absolute untranslatability follow from this fact and others of the kind? Rather, they may be taken to remind us how complicated a business translating is, but not to the extent of making untranslatability our ideology. Emphasizing untranslatability, which is a widespread attitude nowadays, is hardly productive: why bother if our efforts are doomed to failure anyway?

No method exists that could help us avoid mistakes once and for all. Mistakes happen anyway. Moreover, some of them are productive (what kind of mistakes is productive under which circumstances is a separate question). Translation is always a risk, but also a chance. No risk – no chance. No translation captures everything that is in the original, and therefore any culture, especially a dynamic one, needs different translations. Which is not to say, however, that all translations are equally important, nor that 'anything goes'. Any translation is commensurate with the original in one way or another. This is an important point to make, because too often these days we hear that there are no originals around, only translations of translations. How the relationship between the translation and the original is constructed is sometimes a very difficult question, but – both in principle and in practice – it *is* quite solvable. Though there can be no single canonical translation of any text (including sacred ones) for all time, this is not a cause for frustration but a chance to see the meeting with the Other in the process of translation as a difficult work that requires overcoming our own linguistic and our cultural habits that we take for granted.

Since we all speak different languages, it is our human (not just philological) task to "learn others' languages" and to build up the steps of understanding. This can only be done through translation. In modern and contemporary Europe (and not only Europe), the intensity of translation practices acts as an indicator and criterion of cultures' openness, up-to-dateness and modernity. A number of studies based on historical parallels show that the future belongs to cultures that translate a lot, sparing no effort and time to assimilate other peoples' experience. When seen under this angle, the fate of global languages that

do not translate much, satisfied with the fact that much is being translated from them into other languages, may become problematic in a more or less near future, as has already happened many times in history. One example is the cultural history of Arabic being a target language, then a source language, and then a language that wound up beyond intense translation exchange (Calvet 45-56). For an interesting perspective on the specificity of Muslim culture which was the first to practice an active reception of the European antiquity through translation, see the book by Rémi Brague (Brague).

Alongside the pointillist or, on the contrary, globalist works on translation, fundamental works have appeared in Europe in the last two decades that take stock of overall and working conceptual vocabularies of the main European languages. I would like to mention first of all the European *Dictionary of Untranslatables* edited by Barbara Cassin (Cassin) which summarizes a great amount of research comparing the main bodies of philosophical concepts in European languages, revealing many blind spots to do with untranslatability or discrepancies between languages, cultures, and ways of articulating the inner and outer world phenomena. This huge dictionary is currently being translated into a number of European languages, and Barbara Cassin considers the comparison of the resulting translations at the meta-meta-level to be the next stage of her work. Another interesting case is the transnational project called Iberconceptos, a dictionary of Spanish sociopolitical terms of the 18th and 19th centuries that covers Spain and the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela) as well as Portugal and Brazil, according to the proud report in *Hermes*, a journal that has been published for 30 years by the French National Center for Scientific Research (Goldman 2007). Though the existence of great translation difficulties in both cases is obvious, these two projects may be said to productively relativize the idea of untranslatability. Thus, according to Barbara Cassin, all 'untranslatability' means is that we translate a word or concept over and over again without being satisfied with the results and without giving up further attempts to come up with a more adequate translation. In any case, such initiatives limit the area of the untranslatable and help us seek greater harmony between verbal modes of expression in different languages.

As I have said on many occasions before, the dictionary edited by Barbara Cassin poses a challenge to Russian translators since it features a number of Russian philosophical or general worldview concepts, especially specific and exotic ones (such as *Bogochelovek, sobornost, mir, obschina, pravda/istina*, etc.). It would be good if in subsequent European editions of the dictionary – which is subject to upgrading and supplementing – speakers of the Russian conceptual language could advance both in self-understanding and in fitting themselves into the problem field of European philosophies – and I mean not only its exotic corner. Contemporary Ukrainian researchers, who happened to be the ones to write the articles on Russian philosophy and Russian-language concepts, are currently busy translating this French-language dictionary into Ukrainian. Regardless of their personal motivations, their courage in translating this work deserves credit, since they cannot fall back on any tradition of translating philosophical classics into Ukrainian (for lack thereof). Their work can therefore be considered a national project of great importance. I avail myself of the opportunity to point out the expediency of translating this dictionary into Russian and elaborating on the issues it reflects. This would mean enlarging the pool of Russian philosophical notions and reflecting upon their relationships with the corresponding notions of other European languages.

The late Paul Ricœur was among those who combated the idea of untranslatability and, consequently, the idea of incompatible "linguistic worlds." If we consider translation to be theoretically impossible and languages and texts to be a priori untranslatable into each other, how on Earth can we explain all the real and meaningful human contacts that have

taken place throughout the millennia? Ricœur prefers to regard translation as actually existing in order to then pose the question of its possibility, like Kant who is known to have started off with stating the existence of the sciences in order to then pose the question of how they were possible, once they were in place. As we know, translating poetry is particularly difficult. But translating philosophy is very difficult too: the semantic fields of word-concepts do not overlap, the main philosophical words (*Grundwörter, maître-mots*), such as *Aufhebung, Dasein, Vorstellung, Ereignis* (the fact that Ricœur quotes German philosophical concepts is probably explained with philosophers' hard-to-remove piety towards "the Greek and the German") are different in different languages and have different cultural and conceptual connotations. But these words must be translated if philosophy is to exist as a common cause. A philosopher takes the equivalence (or adequacy) of a translation not for granted, but as a task: cultural affinity is produced by translation rather than assumed by it (Ricœur 63). Ultimately – and this is the key point of Ricœur's conception of translation – translation does not begin with the commensurable and the comparable: instead, it constructs itself a space of intelligibility between languages and cultures. Apart from translation issues, this process of constructing the commensurable is considered by Marcel Detienne (Detienne), on whom Ricœur relies. In the construction of comparable worlds lies the great role of translation in culture.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

The ability to translate is the most important human asset. Although historically its realization has not always resembled diligent translating from one language to another, and translations may have had other aims (for example, to elevate one's own cultural patterns), in our time it can claim to be a kind of non-substantive model of relating to the Other or Others. In turn, understanding the role of translation as an operational model of human behavior in life and cognitive attitude to the world requires a revision of the entire curriculum in the humanities. At the same time, the emphasis on translation leads to a restructuring of the entire fabric of concepts related to cognition in the humanities. At least, language and culture appear as processes and relationships rather than substances. In everyday life as well as in research work, we need to cultivate and develop our linguistic and translational capacities, both in understanding others' speech and in speaking to others. This is related not to the destiny of Europe as a substance or as an original treasure trove of experience (however rich that experience may be) but to the idea of culture as a goal and Europeanization as a quest for a new relationship with the rest of the world.

The French linguist Claude Hagège once remarked that "the Europe of languages has a destiny of its own, and should not look to foreign models for inspiration. The domination of a single language, such as English, cannot help fulfill this destiny. Only a permanent opening onto multiplicity will." And he added: "Such is for Europe the call of the past and the call of the future." Umberto Eco affirmed that "the language of Europe is translation." Of course, this does not mean that we should become polyglots and learn to read all the languages of the world, but, when reflecting on any philosophical subject, it would be extremely useful and sometimes even necessary to keep in mind the problem of translating, or transferring our ideas and their articulations into other languages. In the development of this linguistic and translation ability lies the chance for a future in a globalized world, a future for Europe and a future for Russia with all that is European in it.

As already mentioned, translation (which always, in one way or another, works with the experience of diversity and multiplicity of languages) is not only a mediator in intercultural and interlingual exchange, but also a conditio sine qua non for any kind of cognition in the humanities and social sciences. This is due to the fact that translation acts as an operational scheme underlying all processes related to language communication,

including dialogue: this is what makes it an additional reflexive resource, a new possibility and a precondition of understanding (Avtonomova, 2008; 2016). Translation aims at going beyond and transcending boundaries. It is invariably involved in negotiations between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the own and the foreign. Translation confronts us with the paradox of fundamentality of the non-fundamental. Thus, what is fundamental in translation is not substrata and substances but shifts, displacements and translocations of thought contents. Such non-substantialist translation becomes a philosophical category which has its effect on the meaning and functioning of other categories, pushing them towards non-substantiality and dynamism. Translation in the dynamic of its relationships with untranslatability (surmountable and insurmountable) acts as a stimulus and a precondition for the development of thought. It does not abolish other issues and other categories, but allows us to more effectively discuss them, to sharpen them, and to advance them. This is evident, for example, in the relations that exist today between translation and interpretation, translation and understanding, translation and analytical thought, translation and dialogue.

Thus, the following paradox emerges: translation and translation studies are a sphere of the relative, the cultural-historical. But at the same time, it turns out that "...translation gives us *new chances of approaching the universal, but a one sought for, not a predetermined one.* It is partly achieved in the process of constant expansion of the intelligible space. <...> The commonality between radically different languages and cultures can be found in the very ability to move from one form of intelligibility to another: such moves result in multiple reconfiguration, recategorization of thought and eventually a common sphere of intelligibility is outlined" (Avtonomova 2008, 488, 494).

Thus the issue of translation and untranslatability becomes more than an issue in a specific discipline or in science in general. It acquires a philosophical status. This is due to contemporary philosophy's new attention to the issue of language and communicative mechanisms in general; to the realization of epistemological specificity of translation as a research subject and a practice; to the identification of general patterns of intercultural knowledge production on the basis of the history of translation; to the opening possibility to treat translation as a universal mechanism of human consciousness – perhaps more accessible to operationalization than "dialogue".

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The Untranslatability of a Private Code: John Weir's *Eddie Socket* and AIDS Camp Humour

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Abstract: This paper deals with the untranslatability of AIDS camp. Analysing John Weir's novel *The Irreversible Decline of Eddie Socket*, we will see how camp in general, and AIDS camp in particular, present challenges that make it difficult to translate because of camp's role as a private code. The pervasive presence of quotes and cultural references represents here not merely an aesthetic feature, but a crucial aspect of the author's poetics and the novel's message. By using gay and camp cultural references, Weir preserves a culture whose existence is, at the time he is writing, under threat; and by using camp humor to portray the experience of the AIDS epidemic he conveys the subversive attitude adopted by the gay community against homophobia in America. Camp's identity as a subculture makes it difficult to understand even for native speakers, as it presupposes a specific knowledge on the part of the reader. The use of camp is, therefore, very specific to the American LGBTQ linguistic and cultural context, and a translation into another language would not be intelligible as it would miss key aspects of the intent of the text.

Keywords: Untranslatability, camp, AIDS literature, humor

The question of untranslatability is generally related to words or expressions which are specific to a culture, where the lexical gap does not allow for the translator to effectively transpose the meaning into the target language. Jeroen Vandaele argues how humor is a notable example of untranslatability, since "relative or absolute untranslatability is generally related to cultural and linguistic aspects" (Vandaele 2010, 149) and among humor's core functions is the need to be understood quickly and not be explained. As humor is difficult to translate, subculture humor is even more challenging – and, sometimes, untranslatable. This paper aims at investigating the dynamics that are at work in the case of a specific subculture humor, camp, and the challenges that camp culture – in this case, American camp culture – pose to the translator. On top of the translation of puns or jokes, translating camp presents the additional difficulty of conveying a subculture and its sensibility. In camp, humor and puns are intertwined with high and low, obvious and less obvious cultural references, which make it all the more difficult to achieve an accurate translation and, most importantly, to achieve in the target text the same message present in the original. Double meaning and unintelligibility are key aspects in the dynamic of camp. As we will see, these characteristics make camp particularly challenging to the translator.

In her 1964 essay *Notes on Camp*, Susan Sontag describes camp as "something of a private code, a badge of identity even, among small urban cliques" (Sontag 1964, 275). Camp's dimension as a private language extends to literary texts, and becomes particularly significant during the years of the AIDS epidemic. In a society that already discriminated against homosexuality, the stigma brought by the virus piled on the existing homophobia in American culture, further marginalizing gay people and particularly gay men. In response, AIDS literary production during the Eighties and Nineties portrayed the experience of gay people in America in the face of oppression, in an effort to protest and to reclaim gay identity. The emergency of AIDS pushed gay authors to defend a culture

that had been, until then, quite fragmentary and relegated to the underground. In this dynamic camp, intended both as a language and as the culture articulated by that language, played a crucial role thanks to its history as a private code. Philip Core underlines the importance of camp "as a Masonic gesture by which homosexuals could make themselves known to each other during periods when homosexuality was not avowable. Besides being a signal, camp was and remains the way in which homosexuals and other groups of people with double lives can find a *lingua franca* (Core 1984, 9). In the midst of AIDS, the oxymoronic, paradoxical and unintelligible aspect of camp is important in the relationship with mainstream society, especially when it comes to humor. The use of this 'underground private code' helps to establish a sense of community that is crucial during the AIDS crisis: while until the Seventies American camp was mostly influenced by French culture and authors, and American gay fiction "did not enjoy the canonical status of the … French authors" (Harvey 2000b, 149), after the explosion of the epidemic the references became more specific to the American context – which, arguably, made American camp less translatable. Camp's quality as a private code gives literary texts an elitist, elusive dimension, according to which only those who are part of a certain community can participate. Keith Harvey makes the example of *Angels in America*, which he argues is diminished in its translation in French as "the circle of gay meanings that is channelled through a single word in the source text … is diminished in its specificity in the translation" (Harvey 2000b, 158). Despite Angloamerican culture being highly influential in camp (suffice it to think about the influence it has had on an author like Almodóvar), it would not be appropriate to consider gay or camp culture to be the same everywhere: that means that AIDS camp can be so specific to America that it would not be intelligible to the gay community of another culture, as "metalinguistic expressions – sentences and phrases that refer to some aspect of their own linguistic form – carry meanings that are by definition internal to the language in which they are couched" (Bellos 2011, 286-7) – in this case not merely English, but American English. John Weir's debut novel, *The Irreversible Decline of Eddie Socket* (1989), can inspire interesting reflections on the issues of intelligibility and untranslatability when it comes to AIDS camp.

Weir's novel was written at the height of the epidemic, and it represents a notable example of AIDS camp. The plot follows its hero in an AIDS-devastated New York: Eddie is apathetic, nihilistic, and expresses his attitude toward the world through a detached ironic gaze and by speaking through quotes all the time, instead of directly expressing himself. A blend of "humor in many forms – irony, pastiche, puns, the camp aperçu" (Blades 2017, 148), *Eddie Socket* belongs to a tradition of gay texts that put gay culture at the center. Humor and camp have been pervading gay texts way before Weir's novel, but the use he makes of these elements is something new: *Eddie Socket* uses camp references as a celebration of a gay culture whose existence at that very moment was under threat, and camp humor as a weapon for cultural resistance in a context of oppression. *Eddie Socket* is probably the AIDS novel that makes the biggest use of camp and camp references, in part because of Eddie's obsession with speaking in quotes. After the emergency of the epidemic was over, AIDS texts, including *Eddie Socket*, tended to get out of print and disappear from American culture. The novel was not translated into other languages, except for a German edition in 1990. Recently, however, a few AIDS texts are starting to be re-issued in the US, thus creating a new possibility for translations. AIDS camp texts, though, present a few challenges to the translator: camp's unintelligibility poses the problem of harmonization with the target culture (cf. Harvey 2004, 415). Because of its use of camp, the case Weir's novel could prove to be particularly challenging. Camp is built into the very structure of *Eddie Socket*: the name of every chapter represents a quote or a reference to cinema, musical theater or literature, and obviously the title is connected to

the content of the chapter. Moreover, as we will see, quotes and references are pervasively used in the book, and have specific functions. Weir employs camp through, mainly, two devices: humor and the use of quotes. For different reasons, we will see, these two aspects pose different challenges for the translator, particularly when they intertwine.

Humor, and specifically camp humor, is particularly difficult to translate: Vandaele rightfully notes that "the particular problem with humor translation is that humor relies on implicit knowledge" (Vandaele 2010, 150), which is not necessarily the same in different cultures. Moreover, camp presumes the knowledge of another culture's subculture in order to get the joke. The use of quotes is connected to the same issue: besides those used, compulsively, by the title character, we find quotes and references that presume, on the part of the reader, the understanding not only of the individual reference, but also of the role it plays in gay culture. In this context, the role of the readers and their ability to follow the implications of the references become crucial, through what Leap calls "*cooperative discourse*" (Leap 1996, 160). Harvey notices how "the *space of literature* – including, crucially, translated literature – is one in which a (gay) community can be imagined by the reader" (Harvey 2000b, 147): by the same token, the reader of the translated text needs to be able to imagine the culture produced by that community in order to be able to *participate* in the text, an aspect that became more important during the epidemic, when AIDS texts had not only a literary or cultural role, but also a political one. Michael Denneny describes culture as "an event that requires activity at both ends, on the part of the initiator who raises a voice to speak, and on the part of the hearer who actively attends to the word. Culture *is* the relationship between these two, and that relationship is an activity, of speaking and of attending, and that activity creates the bond that is what we mean by the word *community*" (Denneny 1993, 44). Humor is obviously a feature that demands reader participation in order to be effective, and its "meaning effect has an undeniable, exteriorized manifestation … , whereas the 'meaning' of other texts is sometimes 'less compelling' in terms of perception" (Vandaele 2002, 150): therefore, not only the translation needs to be accurate as it pertains to the meaning of the text, but, in order to convey such meaning, the text has to provide an effect (laughter) which can be constructed, or explained, only to a point. Humor, argues Vandaele, "is not necessarily a consequence of merely the 'literal' meaning of sentences" (Vandaele 2002, 151), but needs something more. When humor is a crucial part of the meaning and intent of a text, the humourous effect cannot be explained away with a periphrasis. A quick reaction and understanding on the reader's part is necessary, capturing, in this case, the inconguity of the situation of the gay community: merely making the reader laugh is not sufficient. In the case of camp, the humorous utterance or the reference carry implications that go beyond the literal meaning, therefore an effective translation is problematic: "while the denotations can roughly be translated into a different language, the connotations cannot" (Diot 1989, 84). We can observe this in the case of puns and semantic wordplay, for example with the main characters' names: Eddie Socket and Polly Plugg. In the first chapter, we learn that Polly's name is real, while Eddie "had instantly changed his name to go with hers" (Weir 1989, 7). Apart from the 'socket-plug' pun, the names convey a sexual double meaning and challenge gender assumptions "in an act of resistance … , parodying and reversing the process that would make men's names stable and unchanging and women's names dependent upon men's, a process that would also insist on the man being the 'plug' and the woman the 'socket'" (Kruger 1996, 198). Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, the names give the reader an essential clue about the main character and his approach to life. The translation of the last names into another language would sound old-fashioned and artificial, but at the same time the pun has to be intelligible to the reader, so keeping the original names would not work. Beside the names, the novel is

filled with puns: for example, Eddie refers to sex as 'the wild thing,' and toward the end of the novel he says: "you spell that with an *e*, I ever tell you that? For gays, I mean, the Wilde Thing. As in Oscar" (Weir 1989, 248). It would be difficult to maintain the expression, which is used repeatedly throughout the novel, and then keep the Oscar Wilde reference, which is obviously significant in a context of gay culture.

In his writing, Vandaele points at linguistic denotation and connotation and at metalinguistic communication to identify the elements that make a text untranslatable, but camp further complicates the issue: it is not only that the pun is difficult to translate, but also that the pun references something that the reader might not be familiar with – as aforementioned, a private code. In this "highly referential comedy" (Diot 1989, 84), what is referenced is often obscure to the mainstream reader – or, more accurately, even when the references can be captured their role in the context is not fully intelligible. AIDS camp belongs in the underground, and the language of this milieu has started to come to the mainstream only recently, with products like FX's *Pose*. References are signs and symbols that are specific to a culture and, in the case of camp talk, to a language. Leap recognizes the origin of gay references in "films and Broadway plays that have gay-centered messages, and anecdotes from the life stories of famous entertainers and other persons with recognized gay appeal" (Leap 1996, 26). With the first category, Leap identifies contents that are explicitly gay, while we should also add elements that may not be explicitly gay in their content, but nonetheless have been assimilated into the gay canon. References to camp and gay culture pervade AIDS camp texts and humor: Monica Pearl argues that the use of "cultural objects that a gay reading audience will readily identify as gay will encourage a knowing reading and cement a sense of belonging" (Pearl 2013, 29), which was crucial in a time of struggle. Among these cultural objects, the most notable are undoubtedly movies, particularly old Hollywood films from the Thirties and Forties, and even though many of them are classics (like *The Wizard of Oz* and *All about Eve*), many quotes come from films that had moderate or little success, often when the star was already in decline: the best example is the notorious Bette Davis quote 'What a dump' from *Beyond the Forest*, later canonized by Albee in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. This feature of camp did not start with AIDS, but the epidemic gave it a new significance. Bette Davis is undoubtedly the name that gets referenced more often in AIDS texts, including *Eddie Socket*: the novel opens with a quote from *Deception*, "then the war came and we were swept apart" (Weir 1989), and *All about Eve* is referenced several times. Georges-Claude Guilbert argues that Davis's appeal as a gay icon was due "not only [to] her cold, hard bitch aspects but also [to] her 'masculine' sides" (Guilbert 2018, 55). Her demeanor was theatrical, excessive, very campy, so much so that, Guilbert argues, "she evoked a man in drag" (Guilbert 2018, 56). These aspects escape the non-camp-savvy reader, and the parodical use of sources cannot be translated accurately. Moreover, in AIDS texts these cultural references are often mixed with political references of the time: for example, it is necessary to know the rumors around New York Mayor Koch's sexuality and connect them to his policies to understand most jokes about him. One of the most challenging passages, from this point of view, is Eddie's nightmare:

> Eddie dreamed he went on David Letterman. It was a camp nightmare, sort of a musical comedy cross between Dostoyevsky and *Grand Hotel*, with an all-star cast (Jane Fonda, Jodie Foster, Bette Davis, and Vanessa Redgrave, his favorite women, for the dramatic interludes) and a crucifixion scene with taps and feathers. It took place in the ice-skating rink at Rockfeller Center, where David Letterman told AIDS jokes. He turned to one of his guests, Ed Koch, and said, 'Hey, Ed, do you have AIDS?' and Ed said, 'Well, uh, no, uh, David, no, I certainly, um, do not,' and David Letterman said, delightedly, cuing the band, 'Then you're the asshole I've been looking for,' and Bette Midler, strapping on a dildo like something out of *Lysistrata*, came out singing with a hundred dancing boys dressed up like

tubes of K-Y jelly. … Eddie [was] nailed to the hood of a 1965 Ford Mustang convertible, the centurions, consisting of the Reagans, the O'Connors (John Cardinal and Sandra Day), the Decter-Pods (Midge and Norm), John Simon, William Buckley, Hilton Kramer, and Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, all in togas. … Dressed in a lavender gown, and drinking New Coke from a straw, he wore a cap that said 'I.H.S.' (which stood, he knew, for 'I Hate Sodomites') and he said, 'I thirst,' and 'I have such a yearning.' Doris Day came on at the end and sang 'Dream a Little Dream of Me' (Weir 1989, 228-29).

In this passage the challenge lies not only in translating the references, but also in conveying the necessary sensibility to understand *what is funny* about this. There is no AIDS text that incorporates the element of quotes as much or as well as *Eddie Socket*. Eddie quotes obsessively, and just as obsessively asks his interlocutors, 'who am I quoting?': "his head was stuffed with advertising slogans and images, big clocks of solid colors shaped to suggest penises, … television jingles, 'Lost in Space,' and literary references, and Bette Davis draining a martini and saying, 'Fasten your seat belts, it's going to be a bumpy night,' he didn't know how to think, or feel, but only how to avoid thinking, or feeling" (Weir 1989, 102-03). Therefore, camp elements cannot be normalized in translation, as they are one of the main character's fundamental traits. To make references explicit cannot achieve the same effect as in the original, because a crucial part of the dynamic is *if* the reader gets it: the reference cannot be explained. Today, these references could also be considered as relics from a lost world – which, of course, they are. The text itself is, in a way: an argument about the untranslatability of these references could have been made at the time of publication, and today we can add the issue of time, on top of cultural, distance, regarding the translation of references to Liberace, or to Rock Hudson and Doris Day: "Eddie dropped his head in silent tribute to Rock, who wouldn't have done the wild thing with Doris, anyway" (Weir 1989, 66). The repeated references to Doris Day are crucial in capturing character descriptions (Eddie calls his mother 'Doris Day'), but they might have a different effect on foreign readers, as all the implications of Day's relationship with Hudson, who contracted the virus as a closeted gay man, are very specific to America's pop culture. The concern, again, is not literal translation, but an understanding of why the use of these references is ironic or funny. Humor, writes Vandaele, "depends on *implicit* cultural schemes" (Vandaele 2010, 150), and camp brings this dynamic to a more complex level. Camp elements are central in conveying the novel's message, even in explicitly sentimental moments, as when Eddie tells his mother about his diagnosis by referencing *Since you went away*: "so listen, now, and here's the point, I'm on the train, I'm riding down the platform, and I'm waving and waving good-bye. I want this moment to be sentimental. This is my David O. Selznick moment, Mom, because I have a terminal disease…" (Weir 1989, 192).

One of the keys when dealing with a subculture in translation is to understand its relationship with mainstream culture: Harvey argues that with camp "we find a trace of much larger socio-cultural attitudes with regard to issues of subcultural identity/ community, attitudes which form part of the complex context within which the translator acts" (Harvey 2000b, 158). The role of camp as a private code, we have seen, entails its unintelligibility even in the original text: Vandaele quotes Maria Tymoczko and her argument that "one has to be part of a 'comical paradigm' to even appreciate – let alone translate – certain paradigm-specific humor" (Vandaele 2010, 150). This is true of camp in and of itself, *before* any discussion of translating the text: many native English speakers would not know what Eddie Socket is talking about – among them, in the novel, his own father. When Eddie is in the hospital with AIDS, he receives a visit from his estranged father, whom he calls Joseph Stalin, and the incommunicability between them is clear: "'you're Shirley MacLaine. … Quick, go out in the hall, circle the desk, bang your fists

for medication.' Joseph Stalin grinned sheepishly, in a bewildered way that made Eddie want to take care of him. … 'I suppose a sense of humor is important'" (Weir 1989, 231). Parents usually represent mainstream culture in AIDS texts, and the fact that they don't get it has a significance in the text that goes far beyond the individual sentence: camp reinforces 'gay solidarity,' as "to understand the slang or catch on to the allusion is also to feel that one belongs to the community" (Harvey 2004, 407). Harvey argues that "translation is not just about texts: nor is it only about cultures and power. It is about the relation of the one to the other" (Harvey 2004, 421). Camp expresses the relationship of an underground culture with a dominant one, and this relationship, we will see, is at the core of its subversive intent. Parody, for example, is a crucial aspect of camp, but it is "only accessible to those who are at least vaguely acquainted with the parodied discourse" (Vandaele 2010, 149). Parody poses the challenge of the intelligibility of references, as one has to be able to understand what is being parodied in order to get the humorous tone, as in the following example: "that is worthy at least of Margo Channing, I think, snapping off the stems of my carrots for emphasis" (Weir 1989, 59). This is language in the second degree, and the second-degree meaning is what gives it its ironic dimension. Usually, the problem is not that there is a piece of lexicon that is difficult to translate into another language, but rather that the sensibility, or mood, or intention of the text pass through *the way* those words are intended. This is why we refer to camp as a 'private code.'

Considering its role as a private code, the crucial feature of camp humor, and especially AIDS camp humor, is based on political incorrectness and the subversion of the status quo: Harvey notices how the "inappropriateness … accomplishes an act of critical resistance" (Harvey 2004, 407). It's not only about a lexical gap, but about an intertwining of lexicon, culture and underground sensibility. AIDS camp stands out because of a combination of irreverence, sentimentalism, and sometimes cynicism: the fact that gay authors took the liberty of using humor to address the tragedy of AIDS and to reclaim their identity and culture in the face of the homophobic backlash is an essential aspect in the understanding, and therefore the translation, of AIDS texts and AIDS camp. In the Seventies, despite Stonewall and the sexual revolution, the gay community and gay culture in general were not as cohesive as they would become in the new millennium. AIDS stands in between. During the epidemic, the strategy of the gay community has been carried out "by affirming, not by sacrificing, a gay identity" (Jones 1993, 118), and this was obviously a subversive act. This is why the cultural implications of AIDS camp cannot be dismissed in translations: the act of recognition declares "participation in the cultural subversions of camp", marking the beholder "as someone who is in the know, who is in on the secret of camp, already initiated into the circuits of shared perception and appreciation that set apart those who are able to discern camp and that create among such people a network of mutual recognition and complicity. … The ability to identify a particular object as camp … thereby creates the basis for community" (Halperin 2012, 189). The idea of preserving gay culture, therefore implicitly looking toward the future, was obviously significant in the context of a deadly epidemic. Through AIDS camp, gay authors regain control of their narrative, even subverting their tragic circumstances through humor: while he is in the hospital, Eddie laments that "even the orderlies who mop the floors are terrified of catching what I've got, like all I have to do is quote a line from *Sunset Boulevard* and they're infected" (Weir 1989, 239). This is perhaps the most challenging aspect of translating AIDS camp: writing about camp translation Harvey usually refers to older texts, but in the AIDS age the urgency makes camp more relevant and, therefore, an element to translate more accurately. The distinction between illocution and perlocution, or between intention and effect, is at the center of the problematics of camp translation. Language, especially in literature, contributes to the elaboration of gay identity, and by

using camp "gay authors … consciously and imaginetively seek to undermine mainstream expectations about appropriate AIDS–related discourse" (Leap 1996, 158). In AIDS camp texts, cultural references express a culture whose survival is at risk and whose preservation is among the goals of authors like Weir. The use of camp in *Eddie Socket* has to be intended as a sign of resilience on the part of the author: the novel becomes "a celebration of the remnants of gay culture and imagination" (Clum 1990, 667), evoking many elements of the gay and camp canon.

The crucial point about AIDS, culture and the role of camp has been effectively summarized by David Bergman, who argued that "camp is the voice of survival and continuity in a community that needs to be reminded that it possesses both" (Bergman 1993b, 107). These times create a completely new role for gay culture, the greatest contribution that AIDS camp has given to gay history. This structure of quotes and references assumes the role, in the environment of a culture under threat of extinction, of "helping preserve a 'gay world' in danger of being lost" (Kruger 1996, 186): the idea of people and texts containing moltitudes, to borrow a Whitmanesque metaphor, implies a purpose of resistance. In this perspective, the tendency to choose a humorous and campy attitude to preserve the culture is subversive, and needs to be conveyed properly in order for the text to maintain its core meaning in the target language. In *Notes on Camp*, Sontag argues that to try and explain camp represents a risk of producing involuntary camp. If we consider, as I think we should, translation as a form of interpretation, I would conclude that camp could be neither made explicit, due to the risk of involuntary camp production and the loss of humorous effect, nor could its references be adapted to the target culture, as that would entail the loss of crucial information about the context. Therefore, when it comes to AIDS camp translation, an essential portion of the text inevitably goes missing. This difficulty might be the ultimate proof that one needs to delve into the subculture in order to participate in it: if you get it, you should read the text in the original, otherwise, you would not get it anyway, not really. But then again, it is not guaranteed that you would get it even reading as a native speaker. As Bette Davis would say, draining her martini, 'Amen.'

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